

# **FRAKCIJA**

**15**

**CHAPTER**

**Season of Iconoclastic Theatre**

# **Disturbing (the) Image**

**Societas Raffaello Sanzio**

**BAK-truppen**

**Brezovec**

**Pesenti**

**Goat Island**



# Iconoclasm was an important word for us

A strong word for all of us who were horrified by Plato in the matters of art. Visible reality was for him but a false imitation of eternal ideas.

Instead of eliminating the appearance of visible reality, art reproduced it in a vain effort to overcome it. But how was it possible to overcome reality not taking its phenomena into account? How was it possible to recreate the world not having the elements of that world at one's disposal? This paradox has been stifling every aspect of art having even the slightest semblance of reality - and theatre was a mimetic art *par excellence*. The first problem for us was, therefore, to destroy the existing, not out of the need for an empty space but in order to shatter the image of the world imposed on us. We felt we had to start something from the beginning.





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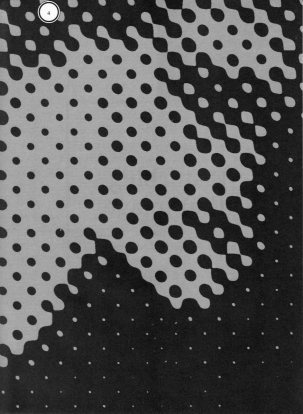
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# Disturbing (the) Image

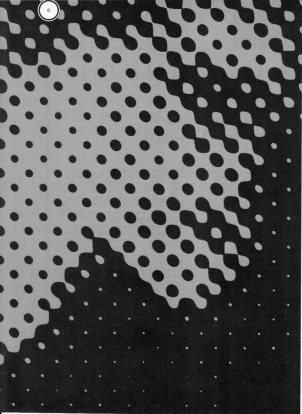
CHAPTER

Season of Iconoclastic Theatre



# Disturbing (the) Image or Iconoclasm in the Theatre

I f Heiner Kunzer's statement that people today no longer live in the world, nor in language, but in the images of the world, of others and their own selves, which they have created themselves or with the help of others, is to be believed, then one could perhaps say that the theatre has yet again taken recourse in illusion, this time the illusion of real-time existence in the world. After the long domination of the visual theatre, the theatre of the ideological gaze, a new, seemingly de-hierarchicalised world of reality takes the stage today, a world of higher and lower degrees of order, a world of a utopian presence on the stage. The dramaturgy of this theatre is still, no doubt, in touch with (often in opposition to) the image and the imaginary, for this theatre still counts with the spectator whose gaze is always directed somewhere or attracted by something. The dialectics of seeing, the deconstruction of the perspective, and the performative construction of reality, all transform the relationship of the observer and the observed into a positive iconoclasm or image-killing. In this issue of *Fractal*, we have tried to sketch a small geography of how the real thing makes itself manifest in the theatre (in the European sense of the term theatre, as distinct from the American term performance). This issue was therefore conceived in collaboration with Gordana Vranko and the Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, who have in October and November 1998 organised a symposium and a season dedicated to the iconoclastic theatre. It is our modest programme's contribution to a re-thinking of the theatre.



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ARTICULATION OF THE TERM "ICONOCLASM" MEANS MORE THAN JUST A DESTRUCTIVE INTENTION WITH RESPECT TO AN IMAGE. THE GENESIS AND GROWTH OF A PERFORMANCE BY AN ICONOCLASTIC ARTIST IS NOT A TEXT, TO BE ANALYSED OR CONCEPTUALLY EXAMINED. THE ICONOCLASTIC PERFORMANCE IS BORN FROM AN IMPULSE, WHILE CONTEMPLATION AND INTERPRETATION COME AFTER THE EVENT. WORDS ARE THE VOICE NEEDED FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE PRIMARY IMPULSE, NOT THE FOCUS OF THEATRICAL INQUIRY



Severino Raffello  
Santa Maria



# IVICA BULJAN

## Iconoclasm: A View on Tragedy

**T**hanks to the efforts of a group of researchers and performers brought together by the Cardiff symposium and the Barokaz festival, we can speak today of the term iconoclastic Theatre. This articulation of the term means more than just a destructive intention with respect to an image. The genesis and growth of a performance by an iconoclastic Artist is not a text, to be analysed or conceptually examined. The iconoclastic performance is born from an impulse, while contemplation and interpretation come after the event. Words are the voice needed for the transmission of the primary impulse, not the focus of theatrical inquiry. The signifier and the signified are fused into a sign, a concept; the word is treated as a whole. Language (in Artaud's sense of the term) is contemplated 'through' the performer's body, i.e. in the mythical way, not yet crystallized into words, into verbal material, but still in the grip of deeper impulses.

When we paraphrase Artaud's thoughts about Classical Tragedy as an opening towards forbidden secrets, as being beyond and above humanity, bordering on madness and the religious, we are very close to the contemporary terror which is the central motif of the iconoclasts.

Iconoclastic Theatre (il teatro iconoclasta) was initiated, in terms of both theory and practice, by the Italian brotherhood Società Raffaello Sanzio in their piece *The House of Beautiful Extremes* (La casa dei belli estremi). The first conscious traces are to be found in the performance *Rapport Necropolis* (1984), in which a special language, *la generalissima*, was devised. This language consisted of a vocabulary of eight hundred words arranged in four rings on different levels. The performance used only four words of the last level.

## γβδγ

...theatre was created a year later, confronting Western traditions by means of iconoclastic warfare. The same idea was carried further in the piece *I Miserabili*, with dance replacing words as a mute parable. The iconoclastic period culminated in *Alto Sefiempo Tutto Antico*, in which the Societas Raffaello Sanzio concerned itself with the mythic and the anti-historical in order to arrive at a complete break with, and independence from, all existing forms of theatre.



*Santa Sophia, Teatro Kriener* was created a year later, confronting Western traditions by means of iconoclastic warfare. The same idea was carried further in the piece *I Miserabili*, with dance replacing words as a mute parable. The iconoclastic period culminated in *Alto Sefiempo Tutto Antico*, in which the Societas Raffaello Sanzio concerned itself with the mythic and the anti-historical in order to arrive at a complete break with, and independence from, all existing forms of theatre.

When compared to ancient Greek tragedy, the ritual used by Raffaello Sanzio is closer to the pre-classical mystery play, in which the participants in a rite examined something terrible and of particular concern to them at that time. With classical tragedy come the actor and the script, intellectual detachment and the possibility of not participating. The ritual that predates classical antiquity, i.e. myth, is a Trans-historical way of thinking, the traces of which can be followed throughout history. Its political relevance is thus achieved not through commenting on events, but through the possibility of examining the extraordinary as offered by the theatre. *La discesa di Idrissa* (1989) establishes a theatre that signifies struggle against the empire of global powers, demanding of the spectator



Soriotas  
Raffaello  
Soreis  
Julius  
César

...theatricality of the body, which can only be detected using the tools of an historian of the theatre. What feature brings the iconoclasts together, setting them apart from a plethora of other movements in today's theatre? Rejection of psychological acting does not suffice. The historical are drawn from Ritual through classical tragedy to contemporary theatre highlights several elements: scream, laughter and dismembered body.

to yield and forget all the shackles of that culture which has frozen all Secrets and is bound by its own chains of glorious death. The iconoclastic theatre offers the time of Kairos, the time of possibilities. Ritual destroys time by terror. Artaud finds this trans-historical mythic element only in the tragedies of Seneca. Is the terror of the twentieth century, knowing no ritual or mythic dimension, nothing but a deaf terror of the question, and do the comparisons not cease here already?

Should we follow in the steps of the historical Artaud, we would perhaps reach the source of the theatre the iconoclasts try to invoke. Iconoclasts rely on the theatricality of voice and body, which can only be detected using the tools of an historian of the theatre. What feature brings the iconoclasts together, setting them apart from a plethora of other movements in today's theatre? Rejection of psychological acting does not suffice. The historical are drawn from Ritual through classical tragedy to contemporary theatre highlights several elements: scream, laughter and dismembered body.

When Oedipus comprehends incest or when Jason sees his sons die, there is a *moment of being lost for words*. The pain is built up toward explosion. Then they speak. In between the two states, a scream is inserted. When Theseus learns of Hippolytus' innocence and that he is responsible for Hippolytus' death he gnaws at himself and screams, eyes turned towards Cyclops. Should the actor use everyday gestures, or even utter a scream from deep within, he will become ridiculous. Such a scream does not sit easily with the sophisticated words that are to follow. The moment of facing the terror, a residue of a pre-classical ritual, is the only moment in which we witness something of direct concern to us.

The problem of the 'Scream' (i.e. of the ritual *in-between* moments) is the formal subject of "Rhyne and Punishment" by Ivan Stinner. Against a richly textured intellectual backdrop, lending itself to psychological interpretation, Stinner ceaselessly denounces the *moment between* the comprehending of responsibility and the voicing of it. The dramaturgy of the scream is examined radically in the latest performances of the group Raffaello Sanzio. In *Amleto* (1992), Horatio takes over Hamlet's scream, representing it second-hand. Only the actor playing the role of Horatio, who is playing the role of Hamlet, is free to take recourse in psychological motivation, as in amateur theatricals. The scream of a great sufferer belongs to the man who has fayed into another world. This scream comes from elsewhere, it is devoid of anything human. Huge tragic mouth lets out a barely audible death-rattle, sending far more terrifying shivers down the spines of the audience than the scream from the bowels ever could. Here we are approaching Seneca's monster; formed not of his actions but of his grandeur. The man in trouble cannot express his misfortune using the codes of everyday communication. He is not addressing people, he is not calling for help. He is discovering a new identity in the world of monsters.

The same analysis applies to scenes of blood and gore. Seneca's tragedies often bring on stage dismembered bodies, cut-off hands and the chopped-off heads of children. A realistic staging of bloody remains is irreconcilable with the aesthetic significance of the scenes in classical theatre. Trying to put together Hippolytus' dismembered body, Theseus is trying to solve a puzzle, the last image of his son to be imprinted in his memory and used for his tombstone. Only in this way can Hippolytus take again his place among men and be rehabilitated. His terrible death puts him among mythic monsters, he was not worthy of a tragic "beautiful death."

The body is but a lost form, and should it become flesh on stage, represented by a blood-soaked sheet, it will never regain the symbolic value of Theseus' words and gestures. The body of Caesar in the Raffaello Sanzio performance is the ultimate aesthetic realisation of a "beautiful body." The actor playing the role of Caesar is old, and his death, represented by a marble statue of Caesar in his prime, evokes in us the most profound feeling of the irreparable death of beauty. It summons the final death, thus challenging the authenticity of an actor's

multiple deaths in 'psychological' theatre. Anthony is played by a laryngeotomised actor, completely incapable of rapture and sensitivity. In the second part of *Julius Caesar*, entitled *Psyche*, Cassius and Brutus are played by two anorexic actresses. The stage simulates some kind of a posthumous theatre put together from whatever remains after the death of action or before its birth (i.e. in the mythic.)

What is new in the iconoclastic theatre is the representation of the actor's body as it is, without the disclosure characteristic of the traditional theatre. The iconoclastic action is focused on the body: just like Seneca's Medea becomes a virgin again, and Thyestes bears sons in his body, so Gijunovich (1990) takes us where language has not yet been discovered and where symbol is the only carrier of meaning. Bodies of dogs and men are completely equal in the performance, the non-linguistic link being established by means of sexual contact. The body of Seneca's hero is an indispensable part of his tragic personality. The classical man is primarily determined by his body, its mortality distinguishes him from the gods, even as its potential immortality distinguishes him from the animals. The body of the classical man is different from ours: it is primarily cultural. It does not see man's animal side as being the opposite of his spiritual side.

Seneca's man is a unique voice (as is the man of Raffaello Sanzio.) The contemporary spectator is used to deciphering soliloquy as an inner flux spoken in a natural voice. Seneca's stage directions show us that what is disturbing about Phaedra or Medea is not that they scream or have convulsions because of the impossibility of love. They do so in a voice that fades. They speak in monologue for they do not hear the external. Like the mentally deranged they call for no one with a voice full of monstrous colours, speaking with no relation whatsoever to what they speak about.

Masoch (1993) points to Masoch's ironic stance as regards the marital bond with a woman who continually punishes him. Their relationship is amorous and erotic, yet under the veil of legality Masoch manages to transgress marriage by dutifully abiding by it. In Seneca's tragedies, laughter comes from disclosing the seriousness in human morality, thus invoking the banality of a philosophy of life. Raffaello Sanzio lists the profound wisdom of the maxims (the meaning of which was perfectly clear to the audiences in antiquity.) Just as Seneca's tragedies did not have a didactic purpose, so among the iconoclasts everyone takes what she or he pleases.

The iconoclastic energies of *Hamlet* are not directed at this or that

theatrical image but at a certain hypericon of theatrical mimesis: one ironically redolent of those deployed by avant-garde critiques of theatrical representation - Artaud's in particular. The theatre of expressive intensities advocated by Artaud is, as Derrida has argued in *La parole soufflée*, merely a variation upon the theatrical text and not its utopian - or oriental - other. Societas Raffaello



Societas  
Raffaello  
Sanzio  
Hamlet

Sanzio have nonetheless accomplished a critical re-framing of the theatrical image - one which exhibits its dependence upon the regulation, control or exclusion of powers extrinsic to the theatre's representational engine

DAVID RODEN

# Iconoclasm and the Rhetoric of Energy in Soc. Raffaello Sanzio's *Hamlet*

*As thus represented, minds are not merely phantas harnessed to machines, they are themselves just spectral machines.*

Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*

The expression "Iconoclastic Theatre" invites a reflex of caution. The history of the term "iconoclasm" and of cognates such as "idea", "image", or "ideology" is, as W.L.T. Mitchell points out in his book, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, one of competing conceptions of truth, adequate representation and inquiry.<sup>1</sup> The charge of idolatry - the worship or veneration of images - is always predicated upon a superior and less derivative form of knowledge. Thus Plato's deprecation of opinion (*doxa*) presupposes the intelligibility of the Ideas or Forms which, as objects of knowledge, are supposedly "self-predicating", exemplifying qualities without referral to a more fundamental reality.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, empiricist, idealist and Marxist critiques of representation have always enjoined the rejection of one or another, *Idol*, or *Idea-idea*, in favour of some demystified candidate which places us in greater proximity to truth, reality, history, etc. In the work of Bacon, Lessing, Marx or Nietzsche, the rhetoric of iconoclasm is associated with an emancipatory project, yet (as the decree of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III against the worship of images in the eighth century amply demonstrated) it necessitates processes of denigration, extirpation, exclusion or control. Thus in his discussion of *Laocoön* Mitchell argues that Lessing's genre distinction between painting and poetry is governed less by their appearance to pure *a priori* forms of sensibility - space and time - but by an ethnocentric valorisation of a

1) W.L.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.  
2) Plato, *The Republic*, Desmond Lee (trans.), (Harmondsworth Penguin 1974).

dynamic, "male" temporality which must differentiate itself from the astatic spatiality of icons.

The rhetoric of iconoclasm is thus a rhetoric of exclusion and domination, a caricature of the other as one who is involved in irrational obscene behaviour from which (fortunately) we are exempt. The images of the idolaters are typically phallic (recall Leasing's account of the adulterous serpents on ancient statues), and thus they must be emasculated, feminised, have their tongues cut off by denying them the power of expression or eloquence. They must be declared "dumb", "mute", "empty" or "lousy". Our god, by contrast - reason, science, criticism, the Logos, the spirit of human language and civilised conversation - is invisible, dynamic, and incapable of being rolled in any material, spatial image.<sup>3</sup>

Another complication adduced by Mitchell - and one that shall concern me in this paper - is that "iconoclasm" such as Marx or Freud, have invariably recourse to figures representing the process of image formation itself: that is through icons of iconicity, or "hypericons". Plato's cave, Locke's *tabula rasa* and Marx's representation of the ideological inversion of the world in terms of a *camera obscura* are all hypericons.<sup>4</sup> The use of figures to figure figuration, naturally raises questions about the epistemological and ethico-political pretensions of would-be iconoclasts. Whether we wish to expunge or merely defame images, we must deploy certain critical figures which circumscribe the field and model the behaviour of the object. This is very possibly a theoretical necessity. However, it is certainly a theatrical necessity: one instanced in the requirement that the production and derangement of images should testify to an energy which impresses, deforms or shatters a representational medium.

3) *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chapter Four, p. 113.  
4) *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, p. 128.  
5) Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, James Strachey (trans.), (London: Penguin, 1991).

We can think of the medium, diagrammatically, as a receptive surface. In order that the image can be recorded, used, or altered, energy must be applied to the surface; perhaps in the form of an in-scribing stylus, or light glancing from the surface onto the retina of an eye. Anything so inscribed can be broken, disassembled or reconstituted in whole or in part in variant contexts. This too, demands energy. A variant of the figure can be found in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud describes the dream-thoughts brought under the "pressure" of the dream-work having their "elements... turned around, broken into fragments and jammed together - almost like pack ice".<sup>5</sup> A piece from Chapter's recent series that will occupy me in much of this paper, Soledad Ruffinello Sando's *Ruinet*, exemplifies the same iconographic principle: it too presents an energetics model of desire, language and representation, this time in the form of a theatrical hypericon.

A theatrical image can be naively distinguished from other kinds of image by its medium of inscription: the bodies of performers, their accessories, costumes, sets, music or effects. We can improve the definition of the theatrical image by



making use of the classical distinction between the original, and its likeness or copy/mimesis. A theatrical image, then, would be a representation whose meaning consists in implied similarities that it shares with the experience or life-world of its audience. In Western "mainstream" or "traditional" theatre this relationship is overseen by a *text* which situates the action in some notional time and place ("Once upon a time, in a galaxy far away...") and inserts the actions of the protagonists within a plot whose development is constrained, as Paul Hecour argues, by a logic of action, temporality and symbol congruent with the "world" of the audience (even where the fictive setting is fabulous or alien).<sup>6</sup> The theatrical image might, as a consequence, appear to have a temporal, narrative form and thus fail to conform to the preconditions of iconography or iconoclasm of Societas Raffaello Sanzio's auto-critique, as I hope to show, concern the very theatrical registration of these two Kantian forms of intuition.

Soc. Raffaello Sanzio's *Hamlet* preserves an obvious relationship to the Shakespearean text no longer prescribes the development of the performance, or a logic of action, in time and space. The performance as such consists in considerable part of repetitive gestures involving all the whole surface of the performer's body in the physical, technological space of the set. The technological space includes a metal bedframe, stuffed children's toys, plastic sheeting, writing materials and a large number of electrical devices (of which more later). The accompanying program notes suggest a tentative equivalencies between some of the toys and characters in Shakespeare's text: thus Ophelia is associated with a talking doll, Hamlet's father, is perhaps represented by the teddy bear.

The repetitive procedures, which emerge from the permutation of these two spaces, resist thematic interpretation: for example, in terms of the "family scene" of *Hamlet*. Thus a sequence in which the performer "fucks" the Ophelia doll, implies a masturbatory violence which is simultaneously (and neither) sadistic and masochistic. Like many other repetitive sequences in the performance, it recalls the description in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of the game with the spindle played by Freud's grandson Ernst. According to the text the sounds which the child utters during the game are "a long drawn out 'a-u-a-u' followed with a joyful 'Da'" upon retrieving the spindle from behind the bed.<sup>7</sup> On Freud's first interpretation, Ernst's game mimes the departure (*fort*) and return (*da*) of the mother. However, since the mother is also the desired object, the game must gratify an impulse for revenge, which can only be realized if the child mimes his deprivation of the object of desire. As Leo Bersani argues in *The Freudian Body*, Freud's attempt to interpret the *fort/da* game founders upon the theoretical impossibility of ascribing it a coherent object.<sup>8</sup>

- 6) Paul Hecour, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, *Karlheinz Meixner* and David Fellner (trans.), (1993), London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.  
7) Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, C.J.M. Hubbard (trans.), (London: International Psychoanalytic Press, 1922).  
8) Bersani, Leo, *The Freudian Body*, Psychoanalysis and Art (Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1986).

In Raffaele Sanzio's *Hamlet*, repetition itself affords a principle of temporal development independent of the relationships and referents in Shakespeare's drama, just as the *fortitudo* ultimately cuts loose from the patriarchal scene of the Freudian test to pursue an independent career. Textual references such as the reduction of characters to child's toys (the Ophelia doll, the Father/childly bear), the citation of Gertrude's account of Ophelia's drowning<sup>9</sup>, the visual pun on "dowd man's fingers" near the end are disposed paratactically, without any syntactic or semantic connection to adjoining citations, or referential and expressive relation to the performer's actions on the stage.

The use of parataxis invites comparison with the selection, which characterises Hamlet's "antic disposition" in Shakespeare's text. Hamlet frequently juxtaposes sentences without regard to relevance, informativeness or consistency. Thus his report to Horatio of the "wonderful news" imparted by the Ghost: "There's never a villain in all Denmark - but he's an arrant knave" followed by:

- 1) acknowledgement of the near tautology,
- 2) an abortive dismissal,
- 3) a remarkable truism ("every man hath business and desire / Such as it is")
- 4) a diversion ("and for my own poor part / I will go pray").<sup>10</sup>

As Horatio retorts, "These are but wild and whirling words" - but they are symptomatic of a more generalised strain in the mimetic logic of the theatrical image. In the soliloquy of act III, scene I Hamlet describes death as "The undiscovered country, from whose hours / No traveller returns..." while the action which frames the soliloquy presupposes Hamlet's accepting, at least as a strong possibility, that the Spirit he has recently encountered on the castle walls is that of his murdered father.

9) William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, E.E.8. Spencer text. (London: Penguin, 1960), act. IV, scene 7. 100 Ibid., act I, scene 5.

Seductas Raffaele's *Hamlet* amplifies the earlier text's verbal and logical derangement in a kind of a mimesis of its mimesis: language here is characterised by extra-linguisticity. However, this formal operation is juxtaposed with what I referred to as the "energetics" of the piece.

Energy - in its most literal sense - is concretised in the staging of *Hamlet*. Luminous arrays of positive and negative signs over the stage are powered by car batteries distributed across the floor of the proscenium. At the periphery of the stage an assortment of electrical engines and a spark generator - quaintly reminiscent of the monolith in Kubrick's 2001 - convert the electrochemical energy of the batteries into a cacophony of guns and turbines, the immolation of a stuffed toy on the electrified iron bedframe, and, via the irradiation of the audiences' sensory surfaces, into electrochemical energy within nervous systems. The set and audience of *Hamlet* is an enormous transducer of energy, a function that is framed and thematized by the presence of batteries and machines.

This *real* energetics is iconoclastic, if only because it is not an image but a multiplicity of events overflowing the borders allowed by convention to the theatrical image. However, *Mauset*'s energetics is also *figural* and *rhetorical*, a hardwired icon of psychic automation.

The notional energetics of *Mauset* prefigures the diagrammatic relation between inscribed figure, scriptural surface and violence; inviting an unavoidable comparison with the energetics of Freudian metapsychology. Far from destroying the theatrical image, it generalises its theatricality by proposing itself as an anterior scene. It is as if both performer and set comprise a homuncular motor whose violent *unwobbling* antecedes the psychopathologies of the Shakespearean text.

In so far as *Soc*, Raffaello Sanzio's *Hamlet* presents a hypericon of the textual unconscious - the unseen, behind the scenes - it repeats the Freudian iconography, yet has the virtue of re-framing some of the theoretical instabilities in Freud's account. Freud's model of the mind as a psychic heat engine governed by a principle of constancy - the tendency for free energy in the system to seek discharge, whether in dreams, neurotic symptoms or conscious activity - is fatally compromised by its conflation of energy and information. The model of energy seeking discharge by the most conductive route is patently inadequate as an account of the minimal recognitional capacities of the mind; there is no scientific rationale for extending it to an economics of desire, or of the image. *Soc*, Raffaello Sanzio's *Hamlet* transposes the botched engineering solution of psychoanalysis into the comedic image of the Ghost in the Machine - to employ Gilbert Syle's celebrated phrase.<sup>11</sup> Because the body considered in itself is only a *zombie*, devoid of psychological characteristics, its operational limitations must be supplemented by a spiritual homunculus. In this instance the *élan vital* is Hamlet-the-performer who offers us the spectacle of a pathetic body which stutters, shifts, drools, screws and masturbates with the objects of its inner life; that impossible non-flex where the *real* Hamlet suffers as cause and not merely as symptom.

This rhetoric of anteriority - despite being affirmed by the Society's dramaturge Chiara Guidi during their post-performance talk - is clearly at odds with the piece's textual materiality. By the "materiality" of the text, I mean its power to circulate in the form of arbitrarily repeatable inscriptions independently of any privileged of source meaning. In *Mauset* textual materiality is exhibited, as we have seen, in the parastatic deployment of freely circulating written and vocal inscriptions such as the repetition of disjoint phrases - "My dream is a crime" / "Love me! Love me! Love me!" - or in the performers' inscription of "words" on a blackboard which allude to so-called "natural" languages without actually belonging to any. This potentiality is addressed at both a philosophical and performative level in the work of Jacques Derrida who argues that all signs of texts - linguistic or non-linguistic - must be repeatable: "a sign that could only occur once would not be a

11) Gilbert Syle, *The Concept of Mind*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1978). See Chapter One, "Descartes's Myth".



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Sandra Andrews

mark; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre or absolute anchoring. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly; it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called "normal".<sup>13</sup>

If, as I believe, Derrida is substantially correct in proposing iterability as a condition of possibility and impossibility of meaning, there must be a fundamental incoherence afflicting any project - whether theoretical or psychoanalytic - which purports to interpret a derivative text in terms of an experience, desire or intention that is anterior or originary. Even the "non-meaning" of automatism or the play of the *foré* are textual, in so far as they are both wrought from repetitions of repetitions.

I do not intend these observations as criticisms of Soc. Raffaello Sanzio's theatrical project. They are, perhaps, worries about the applicability of the term "Theatricalism": if this is to imply a theatre of time, energy, of auratic moments, or of some other "ontological Eden".<sup>14</sup> Nothing could be more nostalgic or hopeless. However, Derrida seems far too rhetorically vigilant to sustain such a naively expressionist reading. It is an allegory of theatre as a nineteenth century machine: a transducer of chemical energy into mechanical or radiant forms. Such a machine, figu-

[13] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, David Allison (trans.), (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press 1967), see Chapter Four.

[14] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", Samuel Weber and Jeffrey McHale (trans.), in *Graphic of the Text*, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press 1988), p. 12.

[14] This phrase is employed by J.G. Ballard in his story "The Terminal Beach", in: *The Terminal Beach*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

rally, would also be a transducer of desires and passions; an expressive instrument.

"Late twentieth century machines", as Donna Haraway observes, "have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed... Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert".<sup>15</sup> If we were to replace *Hamlet's* nineteenth century engines with, say, one of the industrial robots employed by the Australian performance artist Stolare in his piece, *Third Hand* - in which the behaviour of the robot is linked by complex cues to a real-time computer model of the behaviour of the performer - the pathos of *Hamlet* in his dead kingdom of machines and autoserotic toys would be impossible to sustain. The relationship between Stolare and the robot in *Third Hand* is no longer symbolic, expressive or instrumental, but *fascinated*. It represents nothing because its motivating principle is not expressive or formal but determined by a complex feedback process which the performer can regulate but no longer predict or entirely control. *Hamlet*, by contrast, invokes an ideally compliant theatre of matter-energy exchange: "ideal" in that it is presented only as a potential or reserve, like the energy stored in its car batteries. The absence of even the image of a functional relationship makes possible the piece's remarkably insistent textual materiality. It is by the consequent denial of a recognisable logic of action that we recognise the character *Hamlet* as an impersonal power of negation.<sup>16</sup> a prince whose sacrament is a sign and whose "death" is a metonymic situation to the death of another.

The iconoclastic energies of *Hamlet* are thus not directed at this or that theatrical image but at a certain hypericon of theatrical mimesis: one ironically redolent of those deployed by avant-garde critiques of theatrical representation - Artaud's in particular. The theatre of expressive intention advocated by Artaud is, as Derrida has argued in *La parole soufflée*, merely a variation upon the theatrical text and not its utopian - or oriental - other.<sup>17</sup> Societas Raffaello Sanzio have nonetheless accomplished a critical re-framing of the theatrical image - one which exhibits its dependence upon the regulation, control or exclusion of powers extrinsic to the theatre's representational engine. To this degree, at least, theatre in its traditional form *beré* engenders the *a priori*, dead space of icons and constitutes the dynamic temporality and anterior space presupposed by contemporary iconoclasm.

15) Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's", in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, Elizabeth Weed (ed.), (London: Routledge 1989), p. 178.

16) Gordon Vack makes this observation in the Chapter prospectus for the seasons of Iconoclasmic Theatre.

17) Jacques Derrida, *La parole soufflée*, in: *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (trans.), (1967; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

SOCIETAS  
RAFFAELLO  
SANZIO  
**AMLETO**

POST-SHOW TALK

Chapter

15. October 1998

#### **Audience**

I felt extremely uncomfortable during the performance - and alienated. I felt it was a long way from anything I recognized as *Hamlet*. I felt uncomfortable for the performer, watching him go through a very uncomfortable act - a very disturbing way to spend an hour in the theatre. You talked about the audience, it is understood that the work has to be shown to an audience, and I wondered if, maybe, the main reason for the show was to shock, to make uncomfortable, to alienate, to frighten, because for me the loud bangs, the smoke, the machines, the physical actions of the actor, it all centered on being very uncomfortable. It's a very weak word, but... So is the shit and the piss and electricity meant just to shock, to make us feel the terror, the pain of Hamlet? I couldn't see beyond it somehow.

#### **See. Raffaele Sanzio**

Shocking people is not our objective, because it's sterile. Every element has a precise meaning. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, shock comes where it is necessary, for at that moment those were the truest words that Hamlet could utter. The explosion is important in a situation or space. There is a whole and precise score, as in a musical score, between silence and that explosion. These things emerge as polarities. They underline, they charge these polarities. The act of writing, the physical act, is an element that brings us back to childhood, because the journey that Hamlet undertakes is a backwards journey, back to the womb of the mother. Every word is intended not just as a word but as a blast from a shotgun as

well, so the shotgun underpins the wish to be silent. But I can understand you felt uncomfortable, even though it was not my main objective.

**Audience**

I can understand the reasons behind the choices you made in order to show infamy, etc., but those choices are nevertheless shocking - and you know they are. I think it's easy to say "It was not my intention," but you *do* know that the darkness, the dirt, the physical acts, the blackness of the machines, are all very disturbing and shocking. There were different choices you could have made. It's clear your choice has been for the brutal, if not the shocking.

**Sec. Raffaello Sanzio**

Yes, of course, I know that the shotgun is uncomfortable, but I have to shoot. To express all that unspoken in Hamlet, the shotgun was necessary. Yes, I know it's uncomfortable and it's uncomfortable for me as well, but it's within a very precise framework of meaning.

**Audience**

But in the end are we experiencing a Freudian look at Hamlet. It's like a symphony, it's like music, in a way, it's orchestrated. It's also like a work of visual arts in a way. But in the end, on the level of pure form, what is it you want us to feel or to perceive, that is not in the text?

**Sec. Raffaello Sanzio**

I cannot tell you what you should feel.

**Audience**

No, but you must want to make me feel something, otherwise why bother?

**Sec. Raffaello Sanzio**

I have already said that I do not presuppose what the audience should feel. Therefore, I respect both those who laugh and those who cry or whatever.

**Audience**

I understand that you don't want to preset the exact reaction. I sympathize with that and appreciate it. But you are creating a piece of work and you must have anticipated the kind of reaction that you got from Steve and other people. You didn't do it just for yourself. You said that when you were working on it you were not thinking about the audience - you thought about yourself. I find that quite hard to understand.

**Sec. Raffaello Sanzio**

I didn't do it for myself.



**Audience**

If it works for you while you're working on it...

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

It's what I've said before, that the best thing about theatre is the audience. And the audience is unknown to me, I don't know their reaction anywhere in the world. It's not just that the audience is unknown to me, it has to be like that, the estrangement between the audience and the performers is a fundamental element of this instantaneous community which is created in the act of performing. It's the strength of its future. This instantaneous community and communion is created in the act of performing - and then it's dissolved. I am a part of this estrangement as well. Therefore, I could not have had any preconceived notions, because this estrangement is also my wealth. I do not want the audience to react the same way I would react. I am the first spectator, as I said before, but not in a way that I am concerned about the audience's well being or whether I might disturb them or make them feel uncomfortable. This cannot be my concern. This is the concern of a pharmacist, not of an actor.

**Audience**

I think the main problem is simple. This does not represent Shakespeare's text. I appreciate your vision and your aim very much, but since there is practically no quotation from Shakespeare, since you have aimed at the spirit of the character, could you have called it *Macbeth*, instead of *Hamlet*? With just a few differences.

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

No.

**Audience**

Did I understand correctly that you have been doing *Hamlet* for six years now?

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

Yes.

**Audience**

Does it not turn into a routine? How do you keep yourself excited or enthusiastic about what you're doing?

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

By it's very nature, theatre has to do with repetition. It's meaning, it's sense lies in repetition. When you create a performance, you destroy it forever. Nothing remains. It's only up here. What is left of *Hamlet* is up here. So when we do it again, it's for the very first time. This is the strength of theatre, nothing ever remains, save in your mind.

**Audience**

Is it the same performance each time?

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

Technically, yes, because it's a pattern, a score in terms of sounds, actions, words. But tonight's performance, like all the others over the years that we've been doing it, is unique, it's not a copy. So this is, as Claudia said, at the root of the nature of theatre. It would be eliminated if we left out a consideration of improvisation. It's not, as we've already said, the case here.

**Audience**

Something was brought up earlier about the reaction of the audience as a whole versus that of the individual spectators. It seems to me that in the kind of work that you're doing - when you do not think whether it's going to be a comedy or a tragedy, and it's up to the audience - the very formal situation in which the audience is stuck, watching it, is the wrong sort of relationship. I had two people sitting behind me who laughed throughout the entire show, and had I not been incredibly engaged by what I was seeing, well, I was very close to turning round and punching them. With a more open performance, given the ability to move around, I would have moved away.

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

As regards the first part, I never said that I didn't know whether I was creating a comedy or a tragedy. I know exactly what it is. What I don't know is whether people will laugh or cry. But I also understand your wish for being able to move away.

**Audience**

I've never been to a production in Britain and heard an audience so voluble, speaking, reacting so loudly, before. It's very unusual in my experience. It's very interesting, although I felt very uncomfortable; it's very interesting that we were free to... I could hear people laughing, I could hear people cringing, I could hear people talking, and I was talking, commenting on... In retrospect, I feel pleased that I was able to have such a strong reaction at the moment, not afterwards but during the performance. It's very unusual, I think. Is it disturbing for the actor?

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

We've certainly had a lot of movement tonight. It was, from the very beginning, a common occurrence that fifty percent of the audience would walk out. Yesterday, for example, it was very quiet.

**Audience**

Your answer links to what I was talking about, which is - Would all these people have walked out if they could have chosen somewhere else to be within the arena? There are people who want to be there, who want more, and those who

want less. It's the kind of performance that doesn't invite one kind of reaction, it is an open performance that expects a variety of different reactions, and I wonder whether a theatre where the audience is sitting and cannot move, I wonder whether that is the kind of place for this type of work.

**Soc. Raffaello Sanzio**

It is important for us that our relation to the audience is frontal, because it's important for us that there is a clear relationship between those that are exposing themselves and those who have come there to watch those who are being exposed.

**Audience**

That doesn't really answer my question, because you can establish your space between the performer and an audience by other means than making sure an audience sits in a seat. There are devices.

The iconoclastic artist goes back to the original material of the theatre: text, actor and the tradition within which s/he explores how theatre, using logocentric statements, can be freed from the engineering of representational functions



# GORDANA VNUK Festival of the Iconoclastic Theatre

Chapter Theatre,  
Cardiff, Wales, Great Britain,  
October/November 1998



mainstream was most often connected with the Flemish and Dutch wave (Josses, Jan Fabre, Need Company, Wim Vandekeybus and the Dutch dance scene) of the early eighties and the American theatre produced in Europe (The Wooster Group, Peter Sellers, Robert Wilson). The efficiency of their language, primarily in the festival-circuit market, resulted in fashionable imitations which soon spread across the European stages, eventually making the European theatrical landscape uniform (after the fall of the Berlin Wall the aesthetic of the *new theatre* was successfully exported to Eastern Europe as well). Today, wherever one goes, one always sees the same performances; we are terrified by a single theatre language. New Theatre has become a vogue that guarantees a ready-made dose of provocation on which theatres and festivals feed.

At the same time, in the early nineties, the voice of a radically different language (*l'alterité radicale*), coming from the margins of Europe and, in a broader context, from non-European cultures became ever more discernible. We might call that phenomenon *post-mainstream* (as described by Knut Ove Arstam) for want of a more accurate term. The *post-mainstream* shifts the focus of the artistic interest from the western centres of economic and cultural power to other areas. It can be briefly described as a concept which merges styles and traditions that could not be combined within the idea of the mainstream. Combinations such as theatre of the image with ritual theatre or contemporary technology with traditional forms. The artists using that type of language situate themselves radically on the margins. Their performances are not intended solely for exploitation by the international theatre market: they find their place primarily within the environment from which they originate. In most cases it is a question of strong directorial concepts easily handling diverse theatre styles, genres, methods of directing and acting. Recycling not only the tradition of their own, often multicultural environment, but also the forms of the mainstream itself. The decoding and deciphering of that theatre language creates certain problems of perception because the staging, or decorative, elements of the old and used-up theatre styles are often employed, as well as elements of local folklore and popular mythology. This sometimes gives the impression of an old-fashioned or folklore theatre, and remarks such as *it is the theatre of the seventies*, - *we have seen plenty of that in the theatre of Eastern Europe*, and the like, can often be heard.

## II

In the context of *post-mainstream* we can talk about several circles. In the innermost one I include several artists who deal with the problem of iconoclasm, i.e. destruction of the image as a potential bearer of ideology. We have witnessed a large number of new-theatre mainstream artists, who often come from the field of visual arts, attempt to liberate the language of theatre from the ideology of the text by relying upon image as a possible solution. In their rejection of the text they start outside the problem. The transchastic artist goes back to the original material of the theatre: text, actor and the tradition within which S/he explores

how theatre, using logocentric statements, can be freed from the engineering of representational functions. At the same time, *She* deals with the ideology of image: how to connect the liberated sentence with the liberated image will be her/his main concern. In other words, *She* sets the question of how to protect theatre from the codification that blocks the imagination.

Analysing iconoclastic theatre, defined in these terms, we can rely on the anti-psychological theories of Deleuze and Guattari who, in their book *The Anti-Oedipus*, write of the fluxes of desire. Our unconscious is too vast to have an object of desire. "One could rather say that desire lacks subject, or that desire lacks a stable subject..." (*The Anti-Oedipus*). Society imposes objects of desire in order to implement repression. The unconscious does not ask what the meaning of the object is but what is its usage. The unconscious does not create images, but the energy of desire: it does not produce the concrete, but produces the production, the mechanism of the unformed. The desire does not ask: *What does it mean?*, but *How does it work?* The meanings belong to the reading. Every codification is a system of ideological traps, for "the imaginary consciousness makes nothingness, the absence of essence, its object" (Durand). The obligation of this kind of theatre is "not to deliver reality, but to create an allusion to the conceivable that cannot be represented" (Lipstadt).

Counting on the instability of the subject, iconoclastic theatre starts from interactions and differences. Saussure, emphasising the relational nature of the linguistic system, states that "in the linguistic system there are only differences, without positive terms... Language is not substance, but form." (Grosz). Language does not consist of words, as positive entities which attract each other in mutual relations in order to create a system, but of the signs which are products of the system of differences. "The signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier" (Lacan). If we apply this formula to the analysis of the dramaturgical methods used by iconoclastic artists, we shall see that the dramatic subject does not exist as a positive entity, comprised of a certain number of formative or psychological characteristics; it is its phenomenological aspect that is put into question.

It is not simply a matter of destroying dramatic character, using methods which we have already encountered (and exhausted) in the practice of modern theatre from Strindberg onwards (the so-called technique of elementary characters), but of attempting to find a relational system of differences in which dramatic elements (dramatic characters) would not exist as such, but only in relation to other elements (other dramatic characters), which would also not merely be only present or absent. In the performance by the company *Soc. Raffaello Sanzio*, Hamlet's question *to be or not to be* is transformed into *to be and not to be*. Hamlet withdraws into the space of that uneasy balance like an autistic child: he assumes a neutral position which is not a void, but *being and not being* at the same time. The strength of that position, which precedes language and the story, offers him

a wide range of opportunities. The Son, Raffaello Sanzio return Hamlet to his childhood, in which relationships are reduced to basic elements: breastfeeding, defecation (the performer urinates on stage, writes with his faeces on the wall), and parents that become dolls to play with (the father is present in the form of a teddy bear, Horatio is a parrot, Ophelia is a talking doll, and the mother is a kangaroo). Underground forces at work in *Asklepi* are, here, nothing more than a series of differences which frighten by their arbitrariness. To emphasise the distance even more, Hamlet is played by Horatio, the justification for which exists in Shakespeare's play. At the end of the tragedy, Hamlet assigns to Horatio the task of telling his story to the world:

*Above thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story. (V.2)*

How to tell a story that is, in its complexity, unattainable in language? How to reach Hamlet, and not encode him, not restrict him by the poverty of his representational forms? The actor writes the text on the wall, constantly modifying words for which he always keeps finding new meanings (how to crack the code of the sentence?) Every sentence means something specific until it starts meaning something else. That something else is always a hidden possibility. Unbearable and disturbing explosions and gun shots, which we hear in the performance, denote the utmost possibility of what Hamlet would like to express, but for which he finds the human voice and language insufficient. The stage is surrounded by batteries and machines which turn on automatically. In the long-lasting intervals of silence, both they and the performer are recharging their energies. Explosions - silence, these are the two power poles between which the pulse of the performance is situated.

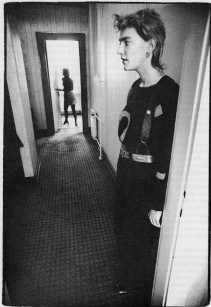
In a similar way, in Brezovic's *Hamlet* (Turkish Drama, Shoppe, 1995), we cannot find out who Hamlet really is and what he looks like: his words are dispersed through the dramaturgical functions of other characters. Hamlet refuses to be encoded into a precise entity, his phenomenological aspect yet again becomes questionable. Derrida defines every element of the system by "the traces of other elements of the system". That chain, that creation, is the text which was created in the transformation of another text. "There are only differences and traces of traces everywhere" (*Positions*). That means that Hamlet does not exist as a dramatic character as such, with a certain number of features; he exists by virtue of being different from Laertes or Claudius, by means of the traces left in him by other characters, characters who in their own turn are also externalised elements of the whole system of Shakespeare's play. If we would want to take the matter to its extreme, we might say that even the play *Hamlet* consists of traces and transformations of other Shakespeare plays. The system of differences can therefore be infinitely multiplied through *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, etc.



Yet another example could be Brezovec's performance *So, So*, in the performance, based on the autobiographical texts of French visual artist Sophie Calle - *Suites Venitiennes*, *Hotel* and *Mistress Venice* - two French actresses and a Croatian actor play out the narration of a story in a real hotel apartment. Within the complex web of text in *Suites Venitiennes*, the actor appears as Henry B., the male object of desire. One of the actresses narrates, while the other participates in the story as the subject. The man supplies the authoress with emotion; however, at the same time, that emotion does not exist. All the elements of an emotional sexual intercourse are present. These elements flourish, prepare for consummation, but when the meeting finally occurs, the catharsis fails to happen. The Croatian language which the actor uses, foreign to both French actresses, only adds to the stranger's mystery and fans the female fantasy. But the actor is actually uttering female texts from the collection *Hotel*. The mine-ex-couver of the two stories overlap: the man is in the position of a chambermaid, while the two women are in the position of a married couple on whom she spies. This creates constant jump-cuts from one system to the other, and the male-female relationship vibrates in the maximum number of combinations. The iconoclastic aspect of the performance, through its openness, leaves infinite possibilities of interpretation to the audience.

But the layering goes on. The performance is given in a real environment, in a real hotel room. The effect of complete authenticity is dissolved with the projection of a film on the walls of the room: everyday scenes from Venice where Sophie Calle's stories really take place. On the backdrop of such a realistic palimpsest something strange and bizarre happens. The actors play the game and quit it, something is burning in them and is then extinguished, some strange energies become manifest. We cannot define what we are watching - we do not know who is who and to whom the words actually belong. There is one only fixed, solid image at the very end - four photographs by Sophie Calle projected on the wall. Only these photographs, this single physical image, point toward something that might be the ultimate purpose and goal of this process: to expose the conflicting mental and emotional states which had brought these images to expression. In other words, to outline the structures of the energies that preceded the creation of these photographs.

In a similar way, the performance *sea & poison* by Goat Island breaks down the process through which we come to the final scene (death of the young George on the battlefield). What precedes it is a series of floating images, the fragility and unfinished state of which require the active involvement of the audience. The images are simultaneously created and destroyed; they are shown in the very process of coming into being. The performance seems to question the border-line which defines the final shape of an image, i.e. in which moment does the image become codified, fixed in its meaning. The heap of earth on the performer's head acquires the meaning of fertile soil when seed is planted into it. The meaning



Shirley Henson, So, So

consolidates when watering and positioning of a lamp, representing the sun the plant needs, are added to this action.

Speaking of the rehearsing/devising process, Goat Island emphasises that it follows the same non-ideological principles as are visible in the actual performance. Members of the company never begin work with a pre-set goal. They never know where the performance is going and the way it will look in the end. Everything is very fragile and a large number of possibilities, originating in simple relations between the body and space, are open.

The extreme playfulness of the BAK-truppen company could be described as the ultimate consequence of these procedures. The framework of the show is hard to discern – we hear obscure texts about drinking hinges, about the unification of the Chinese and the Laplanders, a strong spirit is being distilled on stage and distributed to the audience, there is dancing, etc. Even if something else were going on, it would not matter. One has the impression that anything could happen. The actors are only passing time on stage. The performance seems to be invoking Valéry's instruction about "the hidden power that enables the creation of all fables".

### III

In all these examples the performers are not playing particular characters, they are merely uttering the text. In order to emphasise distance and preclude the identification of the actor with the character, a meta-context is created. Horatio is situated between Hamlet and Hamlet's text. In other examples the interaction of various text/roles and performers makes it impossible to tell who is who, who plays whom and who plays which role. We also notice disregard of the usual features of good theatre: there is no spectacle, no pretty images, everything seems to be somewhat amateurish, awkward, sometimes rough. The actors are being ironic about the concept of relaxed, non-gestural acting (in the performance of *Julius Caesar* by the Soc, Raffaello Sanzio a banner is lowered reading: *this is not acting*). They do not try to represent characters in their psychological complexity. Such an acting style I often call *noble detachment*. E.G. Craig, having in mind the notion of the super-puppet, conceived after the example of some theatre forms of the Far East, wrote: "Naturalism comes when artificiality has become obsolete and boring. But do not forget that there is also a *noble artificiality*". Closing the access to his inner being, whilst emphasising the Craigian "actor's impersonal magic", the iconoclastic actor usually offers a single gestural line for the character, leaving it to the spectator to do the rest.

François-Michel Presnet (Theatre du Point Aveugle) lets his actors dissipate energy on stage; shouting, weeping, going crazy, uttering their own or somebody else's texts, 'acting', all under the illusion of doing something important, of

participating in the creation of the drama. In the end, it will become clear that what they are doing leads nowhere. There are no characters, no characterisation, no story or conflict. It all comes down to simply being on stage. The Actor is the only material of creation. The sound of his naked flesh becomes the form. Present! says of this process: "I do not want the actor to be magnanimous, to give what could be called the food of his art to the audience. Quite the contrary, I want his poetic gesture to break the consciousness of the other: I do not wish that the audience be seduced, but that it recalls, alone in that dark zone of its own self it did not even know existed..."

The significant presence of animals (dogs, apes, horses, cows) in most performances by the Soc. Raffaello Sanzio can be taken as an example. The animals introduce an element of unpredictability into the otherwise rigid structure of the performance. They represent the comment-free physical presence of the body (the body appears as an ironic signal of non-ideological deployment).

#### IV

What concept of individuality lurks behind this sort of theatre? In answering this question, we shall draw upon Klossowski's comment on Nietzsche: "The centrifugal forces never flee the centre, but are forever drawing close to it, only to go away from it the next instant: so strong are the oscillations shaking the individual looking for its centre and not seeing the circle of which he is a part. These oscillations are shaking him because they each correspond to a person different from the image he has of himself from the point of view of the centre that cannot be found. Identity is essentially contingent and every identity has to go through a chain of other identities, so that the contingent presence of each of them could become truly imperative".

Pierre Gyat reaches the same conclusion when comparing man to an onion. For all our striving to peel an onion, layer by layer, hoping to get to its centre, in the end we find the centre empty. Trying to get to the centre of the individual, breaking through the layers of the conscious and the unconscious, we eventually see that the centre that would gather all the contradictory aspects of a person does not exist. Deleuze and Guattari say: "The subject expands over the periphery of the circle in which the centre has abandoned its own *sof*". We reach the schizo-analytical procedure, which starts from the assumption that the subject can simultaneously live the various layers of his spirituality. Such a vision of man is optimistic: he is seen as an inexhaustible source of possibilities. Man is a creature of an inextinguishable range of spiritualities, the complexity of which can nowadays only be attained by the theatre.

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In the aforementioned examples one is dealing with the individual breakthroughs of the artists who have for years been working on the not particularly pleasant fringes of agreed protocols, exposing the ideological pressures of iconic charges, and which the Eurokaz festival has been following in the so-called heroic stage of the iconoclastic theatre. Iconoclasm has recently been boiled down to a few stylistic features, which can be noticed in the work of very young companies, some of which Eurokaz has presented this year, and it intends to do the same next year.

We can speak of the second generation iconoclasts, who have brought disregard for the features of good theatre to its extreme, who are ruled by the incidence of passive theatricalisation, and to whom the following terms apply: bizarre connections, noble distastefulness, passing the time, directing the void. Bearing not the worn out signs, shabby set designs and elliptic indications, the performers are playing with the expectations of the spectator and with the conventions of his perception. In the distinctiveness of their physical presence on stage, by refusing to engage in a visual attractiveness, they neglect the laws of market consumption. Today, the semantic field of the term iconoclasm seems perhaps too narrow, too rigid, almost technical, to encompass this new structure of feeling, which reflects the altered understanding of the term theatre.

A new stylistic phenomenon is being created, which theory will have to approach.



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MÅRTEN SPÅNGBERG

# BAK-truppen



BAK-truppen

THE BAK-TRUPPEN ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH EXPRESSION BY MEANS OF AN EGALITARIAN DRAMATURGY, WHERE THE VISUAL, TEXTUAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND MUSICAL ELEMENTS ARE TREATED AS EQUAL IN TERMS OF SCENIC ACTION. THE TRADITIONAL THEATRE HIERARCHIES, I. E. THE ORDERING OF ELEMENTS, ARE REPLACED BY AN OPEN INTERPLAY, DEFINED BY SHARP CONCEPTUAL ARTICULATIONS, THE USE OF ELEMENTS FROM PERFORMANCE AND DANCE, OF NON-ACTING AS A BASIC PRINCIPLE, AND A SORT OF EXTREMELY FRONTAL CABARET DRAMATURGY, OFTEN WITH A LET'S-HAVE-A-ONE-LINER SORT OF MOTIVATION, NOT BOTHERING WITH CLASSICAL DRAMATURGY FOR ONE SECOND

"Peer, now you're lying!"

"Oh, yes, I am!"

The opening of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, only slightly transformed by the BAK-Truppen. The original denying protagonist - "Oh, no, I'm not" - constitutes, in his sustained lie, the basis of the drama: Illusion. Peer, the adventurer, then takes the audience by the hand on his spy trip round the world. In the BAK-truppen's version, called *Saper Peer*, the hero is exposing the possibility that he's just a boy with a vivid imagination, somebody looking for a one-liner. Considered from a reactionary point of view, this is where the drama vanishes. The BAK-truppen's Peer simply says: No illusion, nothing is happening, except on the level of the personal, and who gives a fuck about authenticity anyway.

For a second, however, the dramatic proposal dies, the theatrical stop/slips out the back door, and the spectator has to accept that there will be no story, no well wrought dramaturgy or believable acting, nothing of the desired escape from everyday troubles, or the cynicism-soaked world - *Ciao, ciao, unpo!*. The BAK-truppen then reconsider: It's resurrection time! Oh, no, there's a monster! (A slimy red character with huge fangs rushes by.) It's gonna kill me! A monster! (A group of soldiers heading the same way.) Nooooo, it's the Seagull! No, nooo, it's Uncle Vanya! (The slimy creature, the soldiers' body parts hanging from its jaws, speeding in the opposite direction.) Holy smoke, the monster is Christoph Marthaler, no it's, it's...

Instead of travelling with them a.k.a. Peer for a dramaturgically correct guide, the audience is invited to travel with the BAK-truppen. Travel to all of those more or less unbelievable places and situations where the troupe has been to, and we are assured there will be no more pre-historic demons hiding in the wings. Perhaps it was Hans-Thies Lehmann who once gave a zero degree definition of theatre: "It's a room without windows." Lehmann dismisses all motivation to define theatre as communication - active, passive or whatever - which in the end always have to result in productions flattering the audience as much as possible. As for entertainment, I personally choose David Letterman over the City Theatre. Then, of course, one can be more or less sophisticated when flirting, and at the end of the day there are some basics that can move any mountain: sentimentality (Alvin Plafelt, spectacle of beauty (Jan Fabek), action (Wim Vandekeybus), or a high comic level (Christoph Marthaler). Hans-Thies Lehmann's definition, both ironic and metaphoric, maintains that the only prerogative of theatre is illusion. One has to close the door, step into the dark and experience a new morning, otherwise what is there to believe in. Acting is after all about learning by heart what somebody else has written, then trying to convince the audience it's one's own, or as Nietzsche formulated it in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "the primary dramatic phenomenon: projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character." It's sad but, to a large audience, theatre is still precisely about this, *believing*. A notion more absurd than regarding emotions in a Whitney Houston song as authentic. It is of course possible to argue that street-theatre, or any open-air spectacle, has left an open window. But this is again an illusion, the opening in the web has only been covered with another kind of drive, conventionally with highly stylised acting, non-theatrical skills obstructing the gaze, or a close encounter with the audience that increases the levels of spectacle, and finally it's a matter of magic: one just has to make sure the spectator is looking for something else.

The BAK-truppen show no fear, no baulkitting around here, since to do what they are doing, in *Super Peer* explicitly and in other performances in a more subtle way, is putting oneself (as performer) in the position from where the audience expect stop/s to flow. In one sentence they turn illusion to/sy-surveys it's dead and buried -  *finito*, over and out. The BAK-truppen open the windows (metaphorically



and literally, in *Super Peer* at one point they unhinge all doors, windows and other openings onto the performance space, announce a break and go on performing, kick out characters and introduce *real-time*. What happens when the BAK-truppen goes on stage, is first of all that there's nothing hidden by theatricality, and second that it's as good as Coke, it's the *real thing*.

In *Very Good* from 1997-98 there is a point where the performer garbles the text and says, with the most natural of voices, "It's always right with a blunder!" It's just that he states it in exactly the same way in every performance. In the same performance an apparatus distilling alcohol is placed centre stage, like a totem pole, and the audience are invited to taste the spirit made during the show. It's really OK, served with coffee and a copper-coin that keeps the ghosts away, at least for a while.

The BAK-truppen, in opposition to most theatre produced in the Western Hemisphere, are a perfect WYSIWYG, they accept the consequences of flitting and use any method, but would never make a second choice, which is the difference between natural and naturalistic. Or as the BAK-truppen put it in their *The Shadows-inspired-Chinese-restaurant-sing-a-song* CD *Come On Every Body*: "you should have a soft drink before we take the real thing, which is always, whiskey."

The BAK-truppen have been working together since the mid-80s and were founded in Bergen, a rainy university town in the westernmost part of Norway, by a group of theatre students. At that time, Knut Ove Arntzen started teaching at the Institute and his international knowledge and network created an extremely vital situation, producing not only the BAK-truppen, but other theatre and dance collaborations, as well as a new performance space: the Bergen International Theatre. The Theatregarage, as it was called, has since the late 80s been the most important space for the development of new theatrical and choreographic expressions, both as a platform for regional groups but also through an impressive number of international guest performances. It is interesting to follow the development of the BAK-truppen, growing on this creative soil, dominated as it at the time was by the highly aesthetic theatre combined with German influences. The Wooster Group and the post-modern concepts, introduced to the Nordic theatre by Knut Ove Arntzen.<sup>1</sup> Even though the early productions are not fully autonomous - e.g., *Germans Tell It Better* (1989) has a set closely resembling that for the Wooster Group's productions such as *L.S.D.* - the group introduces an extremely personal aesthetic where precision is everything and perfection is nothing. A theatrical presentation where the process is visible in the performance and where the performance has been decentralised using a very clear framework, thus exposing theatre as a mechanics of human interaction.

1 One wonders how the Nordic theatre became post-modern at all, a problem based on the fact that it was never modern, but it is clear that the homogeneity of the education system in Scandinavia, and the hegemony of the [Stalinist] oriented acting processes to a large extent closed the possibility for other practices to develop. An exception is the influence of Grotowski but it grew into an autonomous branch of the Scandinavian theatre landscape, due to a principal exclusion from the institutional theatres and its tendency to become therapy rather than a theatrical methodology.

The BAK-truppen is consistently working with a non-hierarchical structure, perhaps a necessity for the work they have presented. The heterogeneity of their ideas and the resistance within the group is congenial and, as one can imagine, a pain in the ass when things are going out of hand. But, of course, this is also what the BAK-truppen desire: a situation, or a process, where the predictability of a presentation or a performance is so loose and ambiguous that each of the performers has to show him- or herself, their own vulnerability, and sometimes get lost. They know very well what they are doing, but they are still doing it. Their cynicism is only aimed at knowledge, and would never contaminate their doing, the action, which would, of course, make the BAK-truppen totally uninteresting since their vulnerability would long be gone. Sometimes the group is fully childish, stupid to the point of insanity, but the criteria of how one should preferably experience their assertion is not of whether they are good on stage or not. The only cogency is to what extent does the expression carry the meaning of their utterances. Now we say something is not interesting anymore, it is saying it that counts. The BAK-truppen are probably the only Scandinavian stage art since the late 70s that has had any political commitment whatsoever. And I am not talking about the semi-institutionalised pieces about immigration, social injustice, bulimia, or incest (which can be as interesting as they want), but they are certainly not political, since they are always only vulgar, or simplified, translations of a politically correct discourse created by the media.

The BAK-truppen would never make a theatre production of something that is better off as a book, a demonstration, a CD, a dinner party, or whatever. There is only the wish to say something that inhibits the team. And as we all know, the problem with theatre is that too many people making theatre is in love with it. And love is reactionary, since we after all still wish to be passionate in temporary sensation, non-repeatable and volatile like dreams. What is even worse, the majority of theatre lovers are not in love with theatre as such, but in doing or playing it, just as one likes to have a hot bath, or prefers JB to Jameson. The mimetic play formulated in the BAK-truppen's performances is a double-reflection where different situations inform each other, and where the spectator has to interpret the friction between the reflections on the basis of those reflections. What matters here is not primarily to transmit a narration or a position, suggested by the action, but to introduce to the spectator the necessity of taking a stand. In short, the theatrical experience has been transformed from being a reading of a narration, presented as a hermetic suspension, to an interpretation of the gaze of the spectator him- or herself. This is a consequence of the vanishing of theatre's political subject, and its transformation into other forms of activism, which theatre researcher Knut Ove Arntsen explains as being due to the fact that art has lost its significance as an operative critical position with respect to politics. "It has" argues Arntsen, "been eaten by its operative flexibility."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Knut Ove Arntsen: *Det my-mimetiske speil, postmodernisme, teaterstudier og performance*, in: *Teaterforskningspolis Grundlagskravet*, ed. Live Hov, Oslo, 1998, p. 97, (my trans.).

The BAK-truppen thus turn towards the activity of seeing as such, creating a kind of density of the gaze, making the ideology of the gaze visible in the sense of Lacan's classical sentence: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides." Lacan here states that the one seeing is always in the grasp of a certain perspective, authoritative or not, phallic or not, and also blinkered by that particular perspective. It is the blind spots that the BAK-truppen are always aiming at. The strategy of double-reflection is an object/event that shows the show, and provokes the spectator to return, to think again, to take a second look. A return which creates an oscillating insecurity between the seeing subject's reading and the cracking object, between a private and radically public, fully inscribed landscape. A constellation of objects or events, which, according to Peggy Phelan, reveals the traces of its false promises - their service to the dreamscape of logocentrism. On another level, it is a question of the notion of the subject's desire to be seen by the other.

The BAK-truppen initially developed a particular visual dramaturgy, which partly abandoned classical representation and was anti-mimetic. They worked with recycled fragments of classical texts and methods, consciously forgetting their original status. In other words, the BAK-truppen were using sampling with an attitude, where different parts highlight each other in an internal critique, and where all elements of the theatrical expression carry the same weight. In this period, the BAK-truppen are experimenting with expression by means of an egalitarian dramaturgy, where the visual, textual, technological and musical elements are treated as equal in terms of scenic action. The traditional theatre hierarchies, i. e. the ordering of elements, are replaced by an open interplay, defined by sharp conceptual articulations, the use of elements from performance and dance, of non-acting as a basic principle, and a sort of extremely frontal cabaret dramaturgy, often with a let's-have-a-one-liner sort of motivation, not bothering with classical dramaturgy for one second.

It is particularly in their Ibsen adaptations, *Brand after Noon* (1987), *When the Dead Awaken* (1990), and a series of performances based on *Peer Gynt* (1992-4), that the group is engaging in what one could call a new-epic ironic dramaturgy which departs from classic narrative or epic structures dominantly used within the modern western theatre tradition. As has earlier been noted, the BAK-truppen are in their productions inhabiting a deconstructive building-site which is utterly remorseless, where the remains of the original text might be two words, or a cover page. Of course, it is a *Witz*world, but the ironic finesse and consciousness are so virtuous virtuous that Harold Bloom would eat his heart out.

In their re-arranged dramaturgy, narrative structures are paraphrased and commented on by means of clichés of classical and romantic representation. Allegory and metaphor are used and re-used, but now in a non-essentialist ironic way, where character or portrait is abandoned and the presentation could be understood as a kind meta-skepticism, half-ironic, half-romantic, commenting on both

theatre as such and the text in hand. The transformed dramaturgy with its additional theatrical clichés transgresses the consummate and formally perfect post-modern expression, opposes the so-called image theatre, and responds to improvisation and personal, private material with its ostensibly floating quality. Consequently, personal anecdotes, generally relating to a larger theme or macro-dramaturgy, and personal experiences and expressions emanating from within the performer, become part of the composition. The performers are enacting themselves in a kind of neo-minimalist, unconfined play with post-modernity. A recycling effect is created when the play with circulated modern and post-modern elements is given a new and imperfect expression. These strategies have been further re-arranged into and used in what could be called a private textual landscape. A world of references closely related to the mythological characteristics of the context in which the group is active. The BAK-truppen must then be understood as having been fully global before the word was even invented, since within this post-mainstream theatrical expression the local/marginal reveals the global/mainstream in a kind of post-ideological trivialism. The formal language developing from these strategies requires multi-layered personal input from the performer, who has to provide parts of a personal realm to stabilise an insecure and floating performative field. The process is letting the group live in an unfamiliar landscape. In this sense, the development which has taken place within the theatre aesthetic is closely connected to the accomplishments in the visual arts and music, high- or lowbrow, pop or not.

In *Very Good*, the BAK-truppen suggest to the minorities of the Nordic countries that they should collaborate with large entities, huge economies and influential structures, even if they be such only in terms of quantity. In a letter to the Prime Minister of the Sami-people, living in the very north of Scandinavia, the BAK-truppen crack open the conventions of power-structures by directly questioning the strategy of the minorities being loyal to each other. This loyalty is of course positive, but the BAK-truppen propose that minorities, such as the Sami-people, should collaborate with China, for example. Through such a liaison, the Sami-people would first of all gain approximately one billion supporters. In relation to the prevailing situation in China the proposal might not be fully acceptable, but on the other hand it is not the political milieu but the human beings that the BAK-truppen are interested in. It is not a statement of crisis, but presents itself rather as a means of overcoming, transgressing, in one way or another, and with a generous gesture, the premises of the prevalent discourse.

The position from which the proposition is made, enhances this generous tone in two directions. On the one hand, the BAK-truppen are operating from a context, and a language, which in comparison with Chinese is infinitesimally small, and the Sami-people have for centuries been abused by the Norwegian officials, and as the BAK-truppen is representing four thousandths of the Chinese population, they are thus in a similar position. And on the other, the BAK-truppen expose an extreme level of vulnerability, of an honesty that relies on the possible,

leaving the resulting contradictions wide open, maintaining that the possible does not become necessary just because it can be realised, but rather because it remains possible.

What at first glance can seem arbitrary, intuitive, shallow, or childish in the BAK-truppen's expression may perhaps be enlightened by Niels Lehmann's analysis of The Wooster Group's performance *Brace Up!*, where he emphasises the potential of deconstruction conceived of as an aesthetic and critical strategy. By means of a similar method, The Wooster Group and the BAK-truppen are using a twofold level of demonstration, where they flood the spectator with expressions so multi-focused that it becomes impossible to complete any relevant interpretation. In other words: the strategy is to insert so many signifiers that it becomes impossible to find an appropriate signified. This surplus of signifiers will give the performance an unreadable quality, where the communicative duality, its directions and conventions, is being questioned. Or as Heiner Müller once put it: "Today, one has to serve as many points of reading as possible, at the same time, to force the audience to make a choice."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, legibility is still there in the sense that "classical intentionality is resurrected (...) as a will to create form"<sup>4</sup> within the spectators gaze, and what seems to be chaotic and arbitrary is actually precisely articulated. Referring here for a moment to classical strategies of representation, one will end up with the conclusion that the BAK-truppen are creating a sign-cluster beyond the flow of signs, where the pre-lingual authenticity is demonstrated as illusory - successful only as simulation.

The BAK-truppen's turning away from a visual dramaturgy and post-mainstream eclecticism that at one point became as redundant as the system it criticised, is clear. In a society dominated by a 100% empty political rhetoric, in a country without any international loans, where the BAK-truppen happen to be based, it became evident that an internal meta-criticism has become self-indulgent. The slide from visual dramaturgy towards a more ambient motivation, where the form was maintained but filled with a new, or other, content, focusing on the formulation of an independent spaces, a place where to show things. Where the outside and inside consequences merge into a displacement of objects/events from reality into a specific framing, that semiotiches the surrounding space - not, however, as a means of traditional comprehension of representation and legibility. The BAK-truppen utilise this specific framing to semiotiches not the surrounding, but the expectations contained in the gaze of the spectator. It is characteristic that what is presented to the individual spectator is the possibility of entering this particular context which is not synchronic with the everyday context of the spectator himself. The important difference here is how the spectator has, on his own terms, become an active agent in the creative process, and this is, generally speaking, the definition of ambient theatre.

3 György Schellitz:  
Parcell (ed. Albrecht  
et. al. Jüdisches  
mus. Archiv, Deutscher  
Müller, Res Publica  
482, Zürich, 1982), p.  
8, (my trans.).

4 Niels Lehmann:  
Deconstruction of  
dramaturgy, (Jüdisches  
1994), p. 107, (my  
trans.).

Up until *Super Peer*, the BAK-truppen's productions were on a formal level related to the neo avant-garde concepts. At least it seems, even though they tried to escape or disguise it, like they are working with one foot in the avant-garde. There are still cultural limits to be transgressed, they almost compete with a seemingly limitless horizon of multinational capitalism, and the BAK-truppen still use a bad boy attitude. The BAK-truppen's break with the neo avant-garde corresponds to the new conflicts in Europe, the deflation of political reality, and the decay of Marxist theory. In *Twilight* (1995-6), the theatrical momentum deflates and the performance turns, at least on a metaphorical level, into something like a lecture and an open discussion with the audience. Hereafter, performances opt for a more fluid composition, with a marked disappearance of dramatic narration, which consequently inflates the cabaret-like dramaturgy. This is particularly clear in one of the preliminary performances, *Verg*, performed in front of a video camera; the transmitted image the only visible source for the audience. In other words, the performance has escaped not only such a vital element as theatrical presence, but has also developed into complete two-dimensionality.

The switch in the BAK-truppen's work is not a search for a new political theatre, but what might be seen as a *de-politicalised* activism, criticising western political, ethical and social strategies as such, e. g. the theme throughout the *Good Good Very Good* series is the situation of the minorities. This political activism, however, has nothing or little to do with western politics, it has no programme, it is specific, has no conventional didactic agenda, but has reached a quite healthy distance by means of a few of those old, shared GIs clichés that are quite true. Still, it is not a hippie sort of attitude, since it fights against any sectarianism, and is rather dealing with a solidarity of ideas. This *de-politicalised* activism is not addressing the audience with a political statement, but with a notion of responsibility of the self. As Edward Jager writes in his manifesto of ambient theatre, it has come to a position where not action but the environment in which the conveyer is functioning socially is important. It does not show a central perspective on our universe. Moral questions and psychological answers do not have any roles in its world of imperfection, or sketches, it is ambient, it is space filling time, a vision of possible worlds.<sup>5</sup>

As we all know, it is difficult to become a prophet among one's own people. For the BAK-truppen, as well as for some other groups in this tradition, the Nordic countries have shown an almost unanimous resistance towards a multitude of re-arranged dramaturgical and methodological proposals. In the BAK-truppen's case, that means that they have been touring Europe for ten years, but have performed in Sweden only once, in 1999. The consequence of such an exclusion, where new and different expressions have not been allowed to flourish, is that

the work of the BAK-truppen has been even more important to the development of theatrical expression in the Scandinavian countries.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Jager: *Ambient Theatre/Impersony for the audience*. Boston, [http://www.dutton.org/22dutton/jager\\_ambient.html](http://www.dutton.org/22dutton/jager_ambient.html).

The BAK-truppen have put Scandinavia on the mainstream theatre map, and have thus forced their own area to react. The development is slow, but there are in the 90s groups using the particular BAK-truppen touch of pop, politics, confusion and wonder.

To conclude, the BAK-truppen are responsible for a theatre revolution. A revolution from which many are now appropriating, while others have made watered-down versions of, and I think one has to count the BAK-truppen among the more important developments in the 90s theatre, if not regard them as the most important one. Ein, zwei, drei, die Kunst ist frei, BAK-truppen forever.

*Relying on bodies the director dwells (s'appesentit / ça Pesenti) on their historical and real-life dimension. He overturns the normal functionality of the stage in order to put the actor into new situations. Bereft of traditional markers of theatrical space, the actor is forced to modify his mental and affective representation of space. The flesh points to this very instance of subjectivity which groups sensitive data, unconscious images, mnestic material*

François-Michel Pesenti  
Mouvements





BERNARD ANDRIEU

## Iconoclastic Text

**T**he way in which Poeschl stages bodies is shocking, the nudity is crude, the spaces restricted, the actors manipulated, made deaf and blind and exposed to bolts from the sky. His theater defies accepted moral standards and reveals perverse staging, if not a perverse director. This repudiation of conventions might be an expression or evidence of new theater. Thirty years after May 1968, liberation techniques do not exhaust the body: they dig into it, assuming its interior is more alive than it may seem. Here, the presupposed consists in the primal scream, a purified gesture, an acting painting to be recovered (at best), or in revealing the degree zero of the archeological being. A mere descent into the interior layers of one's being might yield the definition of oneself. This Freudian acting technique consists in finding an intimate detail that would trigger off reminiscence and enactment. Identifying the person with the role through his or her personal involvement would make the actor all the more authentic: every spectator would therefore be touched by his humanity. Liable to reveal a part of ourselves, the actor might resemble us. But it is the fire of this burning body that troubles us most. Theatrical fire might be perceived as a desperate quest for ecstasy, in other words, for shedding the self. By limiting the resources of the stage, of space, time, and the body itself, the actor has to implement, to enact, to become one with the text rather than with scenery. But an active body is not enough: under stress, an active body displays the social stereotype of liberal energetism. Competition provides the body with an inner drive towards performance. Nothing can stay on the inside, everything must be played out in the course of work. This form of exhaustion of the subject empties and eliminates. The economic renewal of bodies is brought about and steered by unemployment. This body-press logic does not apply to Poeschl. Presence is intense as the present, there is no surplus-producing future. Then how can one inhabit one's body without expecting anything foreseeable, without producing anything useful? How can one lay oneself bare and recover this original crudity and crudely whereby creation would be incarnation rather than mere interpretation?

This incarnation does not imply a spiritual presence in the person's body. It points to a notion first established by Husserl and then by Merleau-Ponty: Relying on bodies the director dwells (*s'appesante* / *sa Pesante*) on their historical and real-life dimension. He overturns the normal functionality of the stage in order to put the actor into new situations. Borelli of traditional markers of theatrical space, the actor is forced to modify his mental and affective representation of space. The flesh points to this very instance of subjectivity which groups sensitive data, unconscious images, muscled material. One's embodiment demands this move towards the very edge of the known, a shift within oneself jeopardizing others, which results in surpassing and not in its opposite as in the theories of expressivity that we have defined. There the flesh is not a primitive body, a lived time which should be regained in order to terminate the quest for others within oneself. The others are within us to the extent of their subtle incorporation being made incarnate.

This intensifying embodiment posits the subject as the actor of his own flesh rather than a mediator of the text. The text becomes his back of flesh, the one he has to set free within himself by embracing the risk of the stage. Incarnation is an intimate manipulation of the being by its own body. The body expresses nothing of the conventional text, as it is forced to surrender to spit out the impossibility of propriety. No gesture seems sufficient and credible in a new situation: the blindness, the deafness, the restriction of space drive the subject out of the self. It cannot survive without providing them with absolute incarnation. A metaphor of totalitarian concentration and of a hazardous bombardment of fate, the device is extrinsic to the dispositions of the subject. The absence of points of reference denotes the historical confusion of the present subject: it has to be completely involved in the enactment of its presence because any absence would be fatal. The embodiment becomes exhilarating rather than sadistic through not being on stage and granting oneself the withdrawal which transforms the actor into a spect-actor; being there to realize the resources of one's flesh rather than to embrace or exhaust oneself. This school of flesh begins with deafness and blindness when the body is relieved of conscience in order to let itself be guided by incarnation and expiration rather than inspiration. There is nothing the spirit can do for the body anymore, just as if it were drunk or in pain. Absolute dispassion that no perceptive rerun can relativize. Going beyond the mental representation of limits, Pesenti takes rather than stages: in order to stage, one should know what, how and where from.

What is there inside the body? Is the flesh worth such devices if no dispositions are available? This deposition that the spectator often likens to desubjectivation, to director's instrumentalization of the body, has to be accepted. Deposition is the opposite of deposit: the flesh does not reside, it exists only through incarnation which makes it bodily visible to others. Movements, murmurs, voices, cries, they all express this dynamics of the flesh through the body. There is no space without enactment of bodies, and the space of the body itself doesn't pre-

exist as an action-oriented dictionary. It builds itself through incarnation of sensations while the device demands their staging. The stage becomes just a pretext for the test of intimate flesh: every human body has already been written to such an extent that theatre has to free this text from the flesh rather than provide a reading of an ontological test.

Exhaustion is impossible because the flesh is forever rooted in the body, existing through the body. The body may distort and strain it but it doesn't exhaust it. All that the others, the spectators of this enactment of the flesh parasite are corporeal expressions; where the subject lies in wait for his visitor and makes it incarnate against its will.



*François-Michel Ponsard: Movements*

*Translated from French by Wanda Valentin*

COMPAGNIE DES  
LOUPS & GUSTL  
*SO, SO*

POST-SHOW TALK

Chapter

3. November 1998

Chaired by Simon Thorne

### Chair

Inasmuch as the performance is based around the work of Sophie Calle, I have to confess that I'm not familiar with her work, so I'm looking for some explanation.

### Catherine Duflet (actress)

Sophie Calle is a writer and a photographer; she's both at the same time. Her work consists of a series of personal experiences. Her work is always connected with her own life. There was a period in her life when she could not define herself what to do, whether she was an artist or not, that experience lasted for a long time. She organised herself to act in a way that is relevant to herself. She was so unsure about whether she was an artist or not that she started to ignore herself very much and she started to follow people in the street. Quite by chance, in this way she found the method of how to fulfil her day. Out of this knowledge of life, developed her artistic work. So one day she decided to follow a specific man. It was always by chance that such occasions arose with her. This man was going to Venice and she decided to follow him there. Out of this real-life experiences she made an artistic work. In the meantime she became a very famous artist and she still asks herself questions and she is still occupied with the relationship of herself with the other, like a mirror image.

### Chair

Inasmuch as she is engaged with her own biography, how does the company relate to her work? Clearly they are not living her life; they only have access to her biography. What is the process then by which they have assimilated the work for the performance we have seen tonight?

### Catherine Buffet

The process was to adopt the same strategies as Sophie Calle in terms of the work. To ask questions such as *Who are we?* *Who is Sophie Calle?* *Who is the artist?* She's engaged in being herself, even though she stands behind the camera sometimes she's trying to entrap and capture the other. So that was the project that was put forward.

### Chair

So the play can identify who is who. With the words *She is a man* or *Who is Sophie Calle?* We again have ambiguity of identity within the performance. So maybe then the question posed to you is quite radical. Here is the proposal on the basis of the work, and what will in the process be the intervention of the director?

### Branko Bencovic (director)

I was interested in very formal questions. So the show was created in a process where first the choreography was set out. The first task was to create a very firm structure. I was interested in the play around nothing. This is the basis of Sophie Calle's work, nothingness. Using the time, the absence of all ideology, fixed emotion. Being fixed in a precise emotion is diffused. Sophie Calle in pursuit of this man, she did more than any woman would do for her lover. She waited in front of a place for a whole day, waiting for him to come out, only in order to be able to follow him. So we can say that it's a romantic structure, almost, but not really. It's only a decision to behave in a romantic way. It's just a decision to ritualise our life. To give a certain severity to our life. So we try to give a certain severity, strictness to this show. In order to give a structure to this nothingness. Nothing is happening, but I wanted to give a structure to it. All the time the performance is being expanded in all sorts of directions, like music that prepares a theme, but this theme never comes. There is no solution to the theme. This performance also brings a whole range of very different impulses, without warning. At the same time it's very strict. It has a certain musical structure. The formal aspect is about three stories by Sophie Calle. The first is an American one, about a relationship that is given in the programme in English translation. The second is about her following the married man, and the third story is about a chambermaid taking photographs of the objects of hotel guests in their absence. Catherine conceived the combination of these three stories and I divided it, she is in the American story. Soverine the story about Sophie Calle following Henri Bec in Venice, and Snifla represents for the chambermaid story. There is only one peculiarity about this cast, because we have female stories being played by a man. Also in a lan-

guage foreign to them. They are playing in French, while he plays in Croatian. So let's say it is a French performance in which he is a guest actor: Sophie Calle for instance asks all the time what kind of man can this Henri be who is being followed by her. Of course, we can explore the possibility that there can be some kind of sexual relationship between the two, which can be placed in the vein of female fantasies. We have also said there are many fantasies. So the relationship of the man with the two women is the structuring element, he is some kind of a macho man, which is banal in the end. The text that is being spoken by him is a female text, the text has been written by a woman, it is actually presenting a woman. So this performance is in a sense about representation in iconoclastic sense. It avoids the image, qualifications in the image. There is no sign which should present him as a woman, only that he is pronouncing female texts, there is no other sign establishing him as a woman on stage. So this show is avoiding the image as much as it can.

#### **Audience**

I've now seen two shows that Branko made. *Electra* and this piece which was very different, but I see something very similar which I don't understand, but I'd like to understand, which is this strange performance, this almost ugly, clumsy performance of the actors, which... It obviously isn't naturalistic or natural, but it's something very clear in what I have seen of his work...

#### **Chair**

Could I add another dimension to this, which for all Branko's talk about resisting the image and about a certain iconoclasm, nevertheless, in witnessing the performance, it seems to me that the style of acting was heavily codified and symbolic and I have no point of entry...

#### **Audience**

I thought the images were created and also there were stories within it...

#### **Audience**

I feel that there is a very symbolic acting style inasmuch as there is a clear degree of intention within the action, but the action does not reveal itself to me as the spectator.

#### **Audience**

We have three intertwined episodes from Sophie Calle's life and her artistic creativity, and we have, when performed in this country, two languages with which many of us are not sufficiently familiar, and therefore, although Branko talks very precisely about the distance of language in using Croatian to distance the third female character and the fact that the third actor is being a woman, how do we know all that?

### **Branko Brezovec**

I haven't thought about the acting process, I wasn't interested in that at all. This part has no symbolic structure, but a kind of assimilation of signs. Emotions, impulses, energies which are also at the time being fused, not being defined as symbolic, they don't symbolise anything, they are just there. There is nothing behind it, they don't mean anything, if you like, the actors just spend their energy. The audience should be kept in some kind of suspense. The audience thinks this has some meaning, but it doesn't. This kind of suspense is actually a false track.

### **Chair**

So that is a false track. Are there only false tracks, or is there... Is there any purpose?

### **Branko Brezovec**

There are only false tracks, because Sophie Calle has said she is not dealing with anything, she is telling you nothing. You might say it is the extreme point of despair in a human being. It is very simple to make a play in the jungle of cities. The human emotion is so great that we cannot establish any kind of positive emotional relationship between two people. So the two human beings are establishing a kind of human relationship by destroying each other. I'm destroying your woods; you're destroying my woods. That's the only relationship possible between two human beings. It's a relationship of evil. This chain of absolute actions in the end represents a kind of longing for human relationship and they are absolute in themselves.

### **Chair**

I think we are talking slightly at cross-purposes here. The issue of Sophie Calle and the thematics of the performance are one thing, but I think that in a way what we're trying to identify here is the actual performative dimensions in which the work exists. For example, I am invited not to a theatre space, but to a hotel room, which is absolutely concerning the reality of that environment. And what I am a witness to is a performance that, by some strange chemistry, seems to reinforce the notion of a fourth wall. The position that I am put in as a spectator is absolutely that of a member of an audience, inasmuch as I am a witness to a performance style that is highly motivated in that I observe the actors dealing with a certain degree of witness, with a story that I have no connection with, because linguistically I have no connection with what is being spoken about, and there is a dissonance. And I want to understand what is the intention in that dissonance. We have the reality of the situation and at the same time we have a heightened, non-naturalistic, but certainly very motivated, it would seem to me, intention in the performance which creates, certainly in my experience, a fourth wall. What is all that about?



### **Branko Brezovic**

The hotel is another mystification in all this. The actors are not behaving naturally in this thematic decor. Certainly, all these objects in the hotel room which are neutral - this interplay implies another dimension. Hotels are also places of death, they also have to vibrate around some imaginary zero. Hotels shouldn't be emotionally profiled, hotels are all the same, and they should be for everybody, all types of people, and all kinds of emotional spans. So the walls shouldn't be painted in very strong colours, for instance, because they should be bearable for everybody. Hotels themselves have some kind of implosion.

### **Audience**

I left the show last night with all sorts of really pleasing musical and visual and performance images. Visually, I knew enough about Sophie Calle to know about voyeuristic elements of her work, whether they were voyeurism in a hotel or voyeurism in some of her other art works where sometimes she is the subject and sometimes she is not. Being placed in a hotel room I felt that I was being close to that same voyeuristic environment and being given images which pleased voyeurs, or might be pleasing to voyeurs. So that setting to me was consistent with that element of the theme. To an extent I left with a very poetic interpretation - and maybe I'd have left even without knowing anything about Sophie Calle, little as it is, little as it was even before the show - and my interpretation of what the three key performers were, who they were, what they were representing, in many ways doesn't matter as far as I'm concerned. I've now heard an explanation from Branko that the characters were representing characters which I didn't understand, and so what? In music I can't know all those things...

### **Chair**

For me the work of Sophie Calle is implicitly about the theatricalisation of daily life. So, to make a piece of theatre from this I find an interesting decision.

### **Audience**

There also seems to be a large part of accident in Sophie Calle's work and what Branko was saying earlier about leaving actors to their own energies... To what extent is there a kind of fixed choreography to the action, how is that consistent and how did that develop?

### **Branko Brezovic**

I try as a director to involve myself as little as possible with the actors... Their story never comes out in a fixed way. So what Catherine, for instance, took from Sophie Calle, was a certain emotional dimension, which leads to her own life. One point of Sophie Calle which corresponds to their own vulnerability. Also, the Russian poet Pushkin says that poetry should be without pretensions. It's very nice to see the actors' fragility in all this. In order to achieve the problem with Sophie Calle, the performers have to be neutral. It is very difficult after having watched something to say *Oh I have watched nothing, I spent two hours*

watching nothing. The French poet Verlaine says: "When I discovered nothingness, I discovered beauty." Thomas Mann says he would like to construct a novel where only the passing of time would be narrated. So the whole novel is only time passing.

#### **Audience**

There is no argument, there is no symbolism, no narrative, and it is nothingness. But to perform it, to live through your own stories, in that sense it is not a nothingness.

#### **Catherine Buffet**

Whatever the actor does is left to his own phantasms. The spectator also has the same starting point.

#### **Audience**

We are receiving our own series of fantasies? Are you saying fantasies or phantasms? Which is different. Are we also seeing ghosts?

#### **Chair**

I understand the desire for nothingness, a nothingness, an emptiness, a neutrality, but at this point I have to put in that there are different cultural expectations of what neutrality is and certainly for me, as a British person, what I saw tonight was anything but a neutral performance. I saw a highly motivated, codified and yet - because I do not have access to the codes - impenetrable manifestation. At that point I have problems. For the performance itself, I have an immense amount of dissonant interference when asked to accept this degree zero.

#### **Branko Brezovic**

What is being told is not being shown or illustrated, as it usually is in theatre.

#### **Audience**

You have a whole series of images that I would love to have the key to be able to understand them.

#### **Chair**

I do not in any way feel that I am empowered to have free play over my own imagining. I have absolutely the sense that the score, the codification, has been preset and at the same time, for all kinds of reasons, I do not have access to the codes that will unlock my entry into that.

#### **Audience**

The accident in Sophie Calle's work is a really interesting point, because the work that she constructs, as I understand it, is based on accidental encounter and what we are witnessing here is, it seems to me, a completely preset text.



Franko Brenner: 50, 50

A POSSIBLE CRITICAL ATTITUDE IS NOT TRANSMITTED TO THE SPECTATOR THROUGH A MESSAGE, NOR ON BEHALF OF SOME IDEOLOGY, SO WHEN IT SEEMS THAT IT IS DISCLOSED IN THE END, IT FAILS TO PASS THE REPEATED TEST. THE ATTITUDE IS THEREBY FORMED/ESTRANGED GRADUALLY AND PAINSTAKINGLY, IT IS EXAMINED AND RE-EXAMINED, DETERMINED, DISSEMINATED AND COLLECTED SO THAT IT CAN FINALLY BE INJECTED INTO THE RECIPIENT'S DISCOURSE AS DEEPLY AS POSSIBLE. THEN IT CAN PERHAPS BECOME THE GERM OF A NEW CONSCIENCE: UNLIMITED CRITICISM



Branko Brezovic  
Eljefrog

# MARIN BLAŽEVIĆ

## The Story of Seeing\*

*My story is my story, the actor's story is the actor's story, the spectator's story, or the critic's story, can be a third story, and it is my job to encourage them to let that story flow within their own mental framework during the performance.*

*Ultimately, my experience of the way spectators receive my performances is Jouset's "happiness of the next day." You have managed to stay alive after the performance and are running as fast as your legs can carry you, but the next day it begins to grow inside you.*

Branka Brelazović

**T**he basic gesture of Brelazović's theatre is a critique, as "something completely elementary, infinitely productive, life itself" (Brecht). Bold irony undermines both long- and short-term ruling ideologies, while a free Aristophanes-like sarcasm often exposes their eager producers and performers who have blood on their hands. Never concealing his interest for the current social and political issues, in post-Yugoslav 90's Brelazović has been grappling with the actual tragic 'Situation', with the task of making it appear strange, "disaffecting" it, laying bare the mechanisms which appropriate its perilous occupation of normality and its urgent ordinances.

It could be said that the two more recent performances, *Censor* and *ElzingBar* appeared as a continuation, or even a response to the two performances which chronologically preceded them.

\* A full third longer and richer the occasional imprecisions and explanations, this essay has already been published on the pages of the *Vesnik* magazine (#1011, Feb 1999), under the title *Storytelling*. In this new version, the title has been changed so as to foreground the subject I wished to treat. Instead of discussing the specific discursive contents of Brelazović's directorial poetics, particularly subversive inside the Croatian theatre, more emphasis is now placed on discussing about a possible process of seeing Brelazović's performances, particularly those from the late nineties.

*Širokosić* and *Enema, Essays*, Brezovec himself offered an interpretation of the Balkan duology: "irrational madness seizing what used to be the Balkans in *Širokosić* turns in *Caesar* into an ironic de-mystifying game which refers to new structures of power and financial and gangster-like rituals disguised by a well known rhetoric, but this time on behalf of the parastatal interests."

What links the performances *Enema, Essays* and *Eljegjbrag* is a revenge motif, conducted through the tragic gulf of (archetype-cast individuals and nailed in the end to the leading protagonists of wars for the right to a nation state (if possible, someone else's as well) in the area from the Vardar river to the mountain of Triglav. First, if we follow the interpretation of the critic Lada Čale Feldman, the performance *Enema, Essays* interprets its literary model, Borges' short story *Enema Zaur*, "as an issue of moral justification for avenging the blood of our fathers, moreover directly referring to the context of the recent war, by means of a quote from a work by Franjo Tuđman projected at the end of the performance. No vindictive morals can conceal the inner potential of the multi-faceted acts of perversion people are capable of committing when prompted by the excuse of the righteous passion for settling the account." This motif is then resolved in the ironic mirror set in the performance *Eljegjbrag*, which ends with a projection of a photograph of the war criminal Radovan Karadžić. According to Gordana Vučk's interpretation, "In order to sustain the matrix of the performance Karadžić is suggested a conclusion reached by O'Neill's Clytemnestra. *Eljegjbrag* is a performance about revenge as a chain which cannot be broken, except by the criminal himself. The question remains: can we, the people of today, endure Karadžić's suicide?"

Finally, a shocking action in the middle of the performance *Marathon* is, as I have elsewhere interpreted it myself, "the culmination of Brezovec's exposure of the disturbed Croatian reality: three marathon runners, a farmer, a craftsman and a clerk, condemned to a Beckett-like end-before-you-begin state, spread a Croatian flag which has been changed: black lines, instead of blue and red, are now framing black instead of red squares."

But the critical edge cuts deeper than simply the names of nations, states and champions of destruction. Notably "intercultural" (Bharucha) oriented, Branko Brezovec's theatre aims to reach the concealed patterns of cultural and even national identity, burrowing through the layers of cultural memory of his own or the performers' community, in an attempt, perhaps, to unearth the reasons for the current grotesque tragedy. Researching down the cultural vertical, this theatre is faced with inherited or newly constructed historical and contemporary myths specific to a community (a nation, a state, a para-state, the Mafia), the constitutive effect of which is reached through productive but also destructive methods.

Judging by the interpretative conclusions outlined so far, one could suspect that this is yet another story of reception of performances which cannot escape, if not the postulates of propaganda and dislocationism (even in the spirit of 'progressive' ideas), then certainly those of the politically committed Brechtian theatre. However, even a parenthetical but ample list of the formal devices extensively and variously used and tested by Brezovec in his performances clears all doubts:

... heterogeneous textual sources compiled by means of juxtaposing, contrasting, overlapping and permeating texts which are seemingly incompatible in terms of their genre, style, subject matter and historical background; self-quotation for various purposes; collage-making; fragmentation and tortuous narrative flows, sometimes interspersed with detached associative and metaphorical occurrences; polyphonic, intermedial editing of information taken from various thematic frameworks and transmitted through several distinct, simultaneously active performance channels, with a particular predilection for photo-projections, video and film; dispelling of the mist of mimetic realism and confrontation with the institution of a bourgeois, visually harmonious and enchanting theatre; the self-referential appearance of the author of the performance with the aim of disclosing the subject in charge of construction of a new representational landscape; multinational/cultural casts; bringing the non-acting personnel and work on *scen* material onto the stage; marking of the characters' behaviour and attitudes through (ironic) demonstration and quotation, but also occasional identification with the raptures of the characters' fictitious (sub)consciousness; *lipisiranje*; strictly functional playfulness within the directorial/dramaturgical concept, even in moments of a deliberate slackening of reins and exposing the performance to the danger of descending into chaos; exchange of abstract and referential choreographed movement; illustrative or contrastive interplay between the actor's body and the projected photographs, films or texts; highlighting the physicality of speech/sound and the eloquence/sound of the body; "emigration from the empire of the Pleasant" (Brecht), carnality and the carnevalesque, exploding the pleasure of expected pretty, harmonious and pure imagery; crossing the swelling grotesque physicality, especially in the Balkan duology, into the framework of the image, with special efforts undertaken to try to break, or at least temporarily overstep, that framework by the high voltage of the performance, even if only through forceful ejection and transfer of bodily energy across the representational borders, since the body itself remains bound by the spectators' gaze; a strong, symbolic change of spatial interventions (elements of set design, costumes); dynamic, multifunctional set designs on several levels, often merged with the bodies of performers or various projections, ceaselessly metamorphosing and filling the stage with a specific music of forms...

How can one then discern a critical attitude in the plethora of actions ceaselessly estranging, disrupting and challenging? How can one follow the intracultural tracks? Brezovec's theatre is a test of the recipient's interpretative skills as well as his patience. How can one pass this test? I would suggest three steps.

Naturally, they do not need to take place in a specific order, neither separately, nor even during the performance itself. They usually co-exist within each other, and can, with altered priority ratios, be applied to any prolonged performance of any theatre work during the process of its reception, interpretation, understanding and, finally, criticism. In the case of Brezovec, the difference is in the intensity, complexity, effect and, most importantly - decision and intention.

The first step could be called the phase of experience, sometimes with a possible hypnotic effect.

A Brezovec performance, especially if it belongs to the Balkan duology, sweeps down on all spectators within its reach, employing every means at its disposal and with the full force of its sign systems, and like a Bacchanalia of signs excites "the heart and the nerves" (Artaud). A Brezovec performance will at first try to re-animate the spectator, complacently certain of a safe automatised remake of painless and only slightly tingling subjects, used to the one-way trading of expected messages and stable emotions. Attacking with intensity and suggestiveness the performance will try to alarm spectator's half-dead centres of perception. The revival through forced experience, even within the span of perceptive endurance (repetition with variations, simultaneity, sudden changes of rhythm) and physiological endurance (the sweat of swelling bodies, chewed-up food, body parts severed by lighting effects in *EljEgZroq*, mental derangement chiselled into the face of Electra, the ghostly screams of her broken utterances), is carried out most efficiently by two theatre semiotic assembly points - the actor, closest to the material, and the music, furthest away from the material. (Whilst the visual attractions also play their part, at this stage it is less on the dramaturgical or analytical level and more on a perceptive one.)

The spectators, placed at arm's length from the actors in the performances *So*, *Se* and *EljEgZroq*, affected by the "severity, relentless humility and determination, the irreversibility and absolute definition" (Artaud) of their performance, have surely felt that "the turning of the head with tensed neck muscles is enough to magically draw the spectators' gaze, and sometimes even their heads" (Brecht). Whilst in these two performances the disciplined body-movement and voice-speech of the performer is dominated by the modes of signifying (*So*, *Se*) or expressing (*EljEgZroq*) feelings, thoughts, states, or attitudes, often mediated by an impressive symbol or by a symbolic action of polysemantic value, in the Balkan duology (and the same also applies to *Murashov*), such a performative discipline constantly tightens, fastening the body to an intentional sign, or slackens in certain spontaneous, though always anticipated and strategically justified, reactions. In a liberated space, verging on chaotic kinesis and blasting cacophony, licentious and distorted bodies are thrown about, the voices of the performers clash, and the resultant energy whirlpool of the performance sucks the spectators into the "pot for melting fire and living flesh" (Artaud).



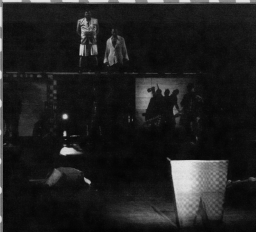
In all of Brezovec's performances he not only counts on the magnetic quality of the musical rhythm, its "speech to the unconscious" (Artaud), but almost seems to extract the visible material from the music, as images made out of sound and transferred into space and time. In *So, So*, the only late 90's performance by Brezovec which completely abandons overt political and social connotations, the chamber music by Arvo Pärt marks the structural joints, measuring and rhythmically controlling the changing intensity, saturating the atmosphere with a anxiety caused by an unattainable and painful "something." In the central section of *EightyFour*, Arvo Pärt's *Misereere* acts as a counterpoint to the action, overpowering the eruption of voices and the noise made by the performers footsteps as they are distractedly and repeatedly moving along the strictly defined mise-en-scene orbits, the music hammering in the terrifying realization that there is a fatal lack of absolution from tragic guilt. On the other hand, the often dissonant mixture of the authentic ethno-music and contemporary avantz imitations of folk melodies - being only one manifestation of a highly contemporary pop-rock remodelling of the folk traditions of various nations confronted in real life and in the performance - initiates and comments on the subject matter of *Borckmann, Caesar or Marathon*, in a retrospective, simultaneous or anticipatory manner.

The first step in the reception of a Brezovec performance is the easiest: your attention is captured, and fascination prevents the crystallization of the significance of the gaudy images and intense sounds presented. Not much is expected: you can completely succumb to it, go away appalled and irritated, or you can accept the game, suspicious and safely detached. If you are among those who have stayed, both attitudes towards the performance can be considered as a good preparation for the second step.

The second step can be called the phase of estrangement, or the ultimate dissemination of meaning.

Using multiple sign systems, Brezovec now cools down the primary, organic intake of the performance, which has heated sensations to the boiling point, so that as soon as the plethora of dispersed impressions start to condense into the indications of meaning of the piece, any reached meaning is subject to the discouraging procedure of relativisation. Through the use of dramaturgical ruptures and overlaps with other texts/performances, generic or cultural codes, ironic breaks, stylistic dislocations, suddenly inserted quotes, repetition or the crumbling of multiple data transmitted through various channels and linked in different and seemingly incompatible code systems, Brezovec would by all means disrupt the stages of his semantic building, making the interpretative additions, elevated by ambition towards a finite, or even normative understanding, fragile.

Sometimes it really does seem that the director finds particular pleasure in evoking incompatible semantic encounters and misleading the recipient with illusions of mess and the mere coincidence of various pranks. Far from such frivolity



Branko Branevicić *Demokracija*

(which does not exclude occasional humour), Branevicić carefully works on post-poning the (final, true, incontestable) meaning. Two methods deserve particular attention in this respect.

Firstly, for the spectator searching for a more stable meaning, the most difficult thing is to embrace the fact that in a Branevicić performance the text is regularly uttered in several languages, whilst in the Balkan duology, the systems of distinct national and cultural identities to which the performers belong, operate precisely through their different respective mother tongues. But, let us take another example: the decision to perform the second version of *Elphinstone* in Welsh and Croatian. The spectator in a theatre is, as that word suggests, the one who sees first, then listens and only sometimes reads. Languages in the performance *Elphinstone* are "spoken" through all three channels, with the purpose of foregrounding Branevicić's resistance to the logocentric greed for accurate and

powerful meaning and knowledge. By means of a careful and attentive listening to the sound manifestations of spoken Welsh language in particular, words are not only heard as a presentiment of concepts, but are also materialized into images which the spectator will see, whilst at the same time reading fragments of the text projected on the walls. Archaism, impenetrability, and the musicality of the Welsh language resulting from its rhythmical structure, the wailing of vowels and the snarling of consonants, all enrich the mythical and ritual aspect of classical tragedy, the starting point of the performance. Not to mention the connotations attached to the decision to merge two languages of "small nations" trying to put up with their grand ideas in a tragedy like *Electra*.

Secondly, Brezovec is a director who will gladly unleash playful signifiers, (un)plugging the discourse cables and carefully, but not without pleasure, awaiting the effects of both intentional and unintentional (short) circuits. However, the spectator of his performances is not expected to chase the senseless sentences in vain, inevitably getting lost in the chaos of signals for interpretative sailing (or - floating). Brezovec will supply a curious spectator with a certain number of motifs, instructions, conceptual - not completely decipherable, but nevertheless perceptible - codes, metaphors or ironic digressions, with more or less transparent semantic potential. The spectator will then be able to pause for a moment, perhaps even, encouraged by the flickering of wandering signals, attempt to where after them, with the aim of finally discovering, or even deciding, where they are leading, what connects them, what they signify, resolved that he cannot restrain the unbound dissemination. Finally, he could perhaps play his own game. (Playing with a Brezovec performance as, after all, you, my reader, are playing with the text you are just reading.)

This is how the third step in the reception of Brezovec's theatre is taken, that of crowding. If only it were also that of a critique.

Naturally, the number of interpretative perspectives and the type of understanding of Brezovec's theatre will depend on the level of theatrical "competence" (Culler) and, above all, on the familiarity with the basics of the author's poetics. Still, even a competent spectator will hardly succeed unless he has diligently prepared beforehand, following the instructions of previous, if possible written down, readings. To make an objective and precise structural-semantic analysis of the dramaturgical overlaps and crisscrossings of the two textual sources of *Elpŷeg/Tro3*, for example, is extremely demanding, since even Brezovec himself, working on the hypotext effect of the performance, does not seem to consider such a strict analytic (re)action to be a primary task. And, since by a series of actions he continually threatens the semantic coherence that a well lodged ruling deep structure should guarantee, how can one penetrate to the heart of the performance, the structure of which may well be tight and stable, but is obscured by a lyrical discourse, as in *5a*, *5b*, or veiled by a baroque eloquence, as in *Cresset*?

So, should the spectator abandon the painstaking dialogue with Brezovec's theatre as soon as the bubble of magic rapture is burst and indecision emerges due to the multiple estrangements of the obscure, as, perhaps, even incoherent or impossible meanings appear? Not at all. If any interpretative passion is smouldering in you, Brezovec's performances will certainly light it up, unless you have been inoculated against them. Test your orientation skills in the discursive woods of the performance, taste the plurality of its meaning, search for the sense or the lack of it, be the author of a new text! Do not fear contingency and the ephemeral, be not afraid of the discursive limitations of your own interpretative selections, reductions, additions, of remaking, expanding or shortening the scope of meaning of the (performance) text offered you. Nor is that text innocent in this respect. As an author, Brezovec offers guidelines for interpretative creation, thereby protecting his performance from the interpreter's hypothetically unlimited arbitrariness. Still, the guidelines seldom merely point to something. I would rather say that they let us imagine a possible, but not ultimately reliable, tools for interpretation. At least until the performance ends.

Only then is Brezovec inclined to clear its dark places with a "reflector of the critical mind" (Brecht), to warn, by means of a shocking signifying agitation, of a (possible) referential framework, if not the target of the performance, as in case of projecting a photograph of Radovan Karadžić.

Only in the end will the interpreter be offered the chance to return to the starting point, but whilst repeating the interpretative effort (if possible, a retrograde viewing), one must be careful. The final point is not the key to understanding the whole performance or the conclusion of its prolonged effect. Nor is it ultimately possible to positively identify a critical attitude and examine the researched results. The intentional surplus of information (sometimes they are inscrutable, as in *Caesar*), the non-signifying voids, the footholds of interpretation slippery with polysemantic irony, etc., continue to confuse. A possible critical attitude is not transmitted to the spectator through a message, nor on behalf of some (versatz) ideology, so when it seems that it is disclosed in the end, it fails to pass the repeated test. The attitude is thereby formed/estranged gradually and painstakingly. It is examined and re-examined, determined, disseminated and collected so that it can finally be injected into the recipient's discourse as deeply as possible. Then it can perhaps become the germ of a new conscience. Unlimited criticism. The birth of "a new spectator" trained and qualified for performing the "art of viewing" (Brecht), not an author's ideal spectator, but a spectator as the author of his own interpretative plot, if possible tireless and incorruptible in his critical attitude towards the (political, ideological) world/theatre around him.

Does the point of Brezovec's theatre seem more clear?

If the answer is in the affirmative, it nevertheless has to be added: a trainee of Brezovec's theatre will reach his full maturity only when he consciously submits to criticism the discourse network, woven of ideological threads, into which Brezovec's performances had caught him, performances of estranged images which at the same time manage to realise its paradoxical double power: to incite and to sober up.

The image, which the perceptive spectator might see in the end, would perhaps look like this: caught, to a certain extent deliberately, in the ideological trap, Brezovec tries to figure out how to break away from its iron grip. When he discovers it, he makes a performance. Always the same performance, about breaking away. In that performance, however, there is no wailing, no words of stoical wisdom, only shouting and swearing.

Never without a plan, of course.

# Goat



*Goat Island the crucifixion*

*The impossible task of impossible tasks at the core of the sea & poison is the task or the art of rendering the invisible visible. This is not, however, a task with the holy or transcendent claims of a Grotowski or a Brook, but the rather more mundane but no less awesome task of showing the poison, the disease, the wasting-away that cannot ordinarily be seen*

LOREN KRUGER

# Island

## the sea & poison

Aberystwyth, Berlin, Cardiff, . . . Glasgow, . . . Zagreb. These and many more are the sites and cities of Goat Island performances. Not in Chicago, where the group has resided since its inception in 1987, there have been few traces. From the first performance, *Soldier, Child, Tortured Man* (1988) to the fifth, *How Dear to Me the Hour when Daylight Dies* (1996), the company surfaced briefly to perform four or five shows over one or two weekends what had taken one or two years to conceive and develop, only to disappear again. In a city where "theatre" means mostly the "blood, sweat, and tears" naturalism of Steppenwolf Company et al, and "performance" mostly variations on the zany improvisation made famous by Second City, this near invisibility is perhaps not surprising. Recently, support from the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, the Chapter Arts Centre and Centre for Performance Research in Cardiff, and other overseas organizations have supplemented the modest (or stingy?) support of the local Illinois Arts Council, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and, for the sea & poison, the Project Millennium Environment Series. *The sea & poison* still appeared only for two weekends in Chicago, but now Goat Island leaves more traces—texts, and objects-in their wake: programs, reading companions, board games, and essays proliferating in academic journals and magazines, *TDR*, *Theatre Journal*, . . . *Fraklojo* . . .



*Goat Island the sea & poison*

Proliferation, the proliferation of poison, contamination, panic, lurks on the edge of *How Dear to Me the Hour When Daylight Dies*, Goat Island's next-to-last performance (1996), in performer Bryan Sauer's story of the *poison finger*, of a bite he suffered at night while camping in the Grand Canyon, and the six-hour hike up to the rim which excreted out the poison. Proliferation inhabits the textual body of the *Schoolbook* (produced at the 1996 Summer School in Glasgow) in performer Karen Christopher's account of diagnosing diabetes or, more concretely, of awakening from a dream of consuming sugar and to the knowledge of a physical body dangerously lacking sugar. But poison, contamination, panic, and the resilience of the human body dance at the heart of *the sea & poison* (1998; performed in Chicago in April 1999) and *the impossible & poison and 37 squared* (the reading companion for the performance). Dancing, moving bodies, and the rhythm of exertion and stasis, have always been part of the *forms* of Goat Island's performances, but in this one it is part of the *content* as well. In *the impossible and poison*, the *impossible* is a dance of ideas and images, but it is also the arrest, the *seizure*, the impossibility of freedom through dance. Dancing in this piece is like Jacques Derrida's version of Plato's *pharmakos*, the instrument of healing and the sign of poison.



The texts in the *Impossible* and poison link Bryan's vigorous climb that pulled the poison out of his finger, to the dance of the tarantula, in which people limes by the spider once danced enraptured (and perhaps still dance) for hours in forms resembling the spider to exorcise the poison (Clément),<sup>1</sup> and hallucination-driven dancing caused by hunger or the consumption of mouldy bread (of dreams: Camposoli). It also cites stories of babies born deformed from Gulf War Syndrome, with their hearts on the wrong side, and the lurid movie images of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, connecting the Cold War fantasy of existential mutation through radioactive fallout with the Gulf War reality of genetic mutation through contamination. Babies born to soldiers exposed to U.S. and Iraqi military toxins, like those born to the children of Hiroshima, do not shrink dramatically into an infinitesimal "other world" that in its ineffable mystery resembles the sublimity of the Milky Way (at the end of the film version of Richard Matheson's sci-fi story). Instead they must inhabit this one as witnesses of all too tangible man-made disasters.

As is usual with *Goat Island*, these texts, images, sources of poison or pheromone do not take the form of declarative sentences, plotting, or polemical dictation, in performance. Nor do they or the pop-cult responses to them become ironic, witty, perhaps even supercilious citation, as they might in the self-conscious pastiches of postmodern performance groups like the Wooster Group, with whom *Goat Island* has been compared. As director Lin Hixson has remarked, *Goat Island* is not really interested in irony or in the ironic, even cynical superiority of the performer over the material that permeates (or stains) many postmodern acts, but rather in the poignancy in the moment of the body's abjectness, arrest, or resilience. In the Wooster Group, the performers' knowing irony stakes out positions in an overdetermined, hypertheoretical set, on which movement is magnified by pulleys, bars, sharp spot-lighting, and the proliferating echo-effects of doctored microphones or strategically placed video-monitors. In contrast, *Goat Island* takes up what feels like fleeting possession of their usual Chicago space, the third-floor gymnasium of an old (by Chicago standards, a century or so) church. The fading afternoon light, as the "daylight dies" into evening blue, grey and black, replaced only gradually by the overhead track-lighting, accents without overly accentuating the both the transience and the intensity of their visitation.

In *Goat Island*'s habitation and habitation of the space in performance, the armature, the syntax, the sentence (in the doctrinal as well as grammatical sense, perhaps) of the story or the argument in their collected texts may reappear in performance as only a trace. Enacted by one or more of four people (Karen Christopher, Matthew Goulish, Mark Jeffreys and Bryan Saner) in variations on a military-industrial overall, in fulgus green-and-brown or poison-yellow, the personal stories in the texts become abstracted but do not lose their affect. The documented accounts of wartime contamination appear in part in

verbal fragments, in part in the recurrent images of one of the four performers, demarcating a contaminated space with white tape, spraying another with a fine white powder, which could be weedkiller or worse — in one case, sugar. Karen Christopher's story of diabetes returns in the barest gesture, as she mimes scraping the syrup of her dreams out of a head and licking her fingers, a gesture against the cloud of sugar-poison that cover or contaminates her hair. A childhood nightmare of being force-fed jug upon jug of fresh milk as punishment for drinking it on the sly reappears as Bryan feeds Mark milk, but takes off in another direction as he careens around, slipping and sliding away between gulps. The healing dance of the tarantula, the contaminated dance of sufferers of St. Vitus or merely of hunger in medieval Europe, and the rugged exhaustion of marathon dancers moving for money and food during the Great Depression, which look alike in their wild and jerky movements, emerge from and submerge into the rhythmic punctuation of Goat Island's movement signature that opens the performance and returns to set and reset the pace: the "puppet jump" of an upward movement that is vigorously corporeal but also puppet-like in the performer's abstracted faces and relaxed limbs.

One of the most poignant recurring images of the piece was both whimsical and abject. Among the impossible tasks assigned during the Glasgow workshop, including "tie a knot in a rope of water" or "lick your eyes without pulling them out," was "grow a tree on your head." In Matthew Goulish's performance, this became a silent narrative of metamorphosis at once comical and mythical, enacted in a series of snapshots between longer acts, in a manner that recalls Buster Keaton as well as Kurosawa (the latter but not the former is listed as a source in the program). With a pot of soil strapped precariously to the top of his head, he waters both pot and head at intervals, while his face-mask registers traces of both hope and disbelief without dwelling on either. But what appears eventually to grow are leaves that sprout from his armpits, but seem to emanate from the mask. A miracle of ecological magic? A terrifying pathology? Like "The Garden" of metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell, "[u]njustifiating all that's made/ to a green thought in a green shade," an image that might have appeared in the show, Goulish's figure absorbs all these thoughts and scatters them out again over the audience.

The impossible task of impossible tasks at the core of the *sea & poison* is the task or the art of rendering the invisible visible. This is not, however, a task with the holy or transcendent claims of a Grotowski or a Brecht, but the rather more mundane but no less awesome task of showing the poison, the disease, the wasting-away that cannot ordinarily be seen. Gulf War Syndrome, radiation sickness, or even the "environmental allergies" of uncertain etiology manifest themselves as surely, albeit less dramatically, than the "bizar-like," "vile and loathsome crust" that "barks about" the "smooth body" of Hamlet's father when the latter's brother poars the "leperous distillment" into his ear. By hammering fragments of this speech in the exaggerating manner of the traveling players in Shakespeare's play

and then lapsing into silence, Goat Island performers leave space and time as yet unscripted to contaminations, infections, and other poisons that do not so immediately reveal their symptoms but that are nonetheless vividly conjured in the mind's eye and the society's imagination.

AIDS or HIV-Positivity may be the most socially visible of these physically invisible afflictions at the present moment, but it is not the only one. Haunting the sea & poison, text, performance and perhaps also audience memory, are the ghosts of distraction, derangement, or madness. These associations are, as I said, unscripted. They do not form a declarative sentence, but rather, as Stephen Bottoms suggests of *How Dear to Me the Hour when Daylight Dies*, an under-ground rhizome, an organism augmented by off-shoots rather than teleological development. If poison suggests the penetration of the body, its punctual contamination as well as the proliferation of microbes inside it, sea implies the unboundedness of distraction, derangement or, rapture, and the undoing of the self-enraptured. It is this sea, ebbing and flowing through the bright images and figures of poison, that remains with the audience as the daylight dies in the sea & poison.

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# GOAT ISLAND

## the sea & poison

### POST-SHOW TALK

Chapter

31. October 1998

Chaired by Simon Thorne

#### Chair

Does the company associate itself in any way with the label iconoclastic theatre?

#### Goat Island

One of the ideas around iconoclasm, as it's been framed, is this sense of the image and what an image is and the idea of the image. I think for our work there is a sense of this architectural term of imaginability, which means that there's enough presence to give an audience, or a participant, or a person walking by, a sense that there is a wholeness, a completeness, any kind of completeness, a visual image, a sound image. The point that was made came from Derrida, it's the idea that there's no such thing as a collective unconscious if we understand the term to mean we're all emanating from the same pool. Instead we're constructing our unconscious as we grow and as we live. So an image is not something that existed before the performance begins, it's not something that existed in your mind before you were born. It's something that only came into existence in your life. And I think that relates quite literally to our performance in the sense that you could read the entire performance as a very slow construction of the final image. A very, very slow, detailed construction of an image which implies that an image is something that's constructable rather than something that exists at the beginning of the performance. There's no image at the beginning of the performance, there's nothing and gradually it's constructed. So I think that's iconoclasm turned inside-out, because it's not literally destroying an image, but it's rather beginning before there is one and looking at everything it

takes for an image to come into being. I think that's one way of seeing a connection between our work and iconoclasm.

I think these images are constructed differently for each audience member and I think that it's important to us in our work that the material is open enough and in fact the piece isn't finished until an audience uses it, because the last ingredient in the piece are the associations and impressions and the ideas that the audience get while they watch. I think that happens every time we watch anything, but I think it's more obvious in a piece like a *Ghost Island* piece where there are a lot of open pieces. Open meaning - there can be many interpretations based on a person's life experiences or even the day they've had that day. So, in a sense we are constructing images that didn't exist before, and not only that - they're different for each person in the room. Hopefully they're all in the same ballpark, but they're individual to each person. Their version of the show. It would be really good to hear from some people what their version of the show was, too.

One of the things what Karen's saying brings to my mind, is the audience as a witness rather than a spectator. I think that coming from an American culture we're bombarded with images that take our desires and I think that kind of pre-packaged image that's complete and whole and digestible also plans for a very passive spectator and I think that we're interested in fragility and incompleteness and the non-static and a constant movement of our piece that takes a certain kind of energy from the audience in putting it together. The witnesses make a judgement of what they see.

#### **Audience**

I'm interested in the word fragility here. It seems a very well defined piece and maybe spacious, but I did feel it was very much preconceived and I actually had a problem with that. It was a process that I didn't have to watch.

#### **Chair**

Does that go for anybody else? For myself, what I found was the notion of completeness, the very slow construction of a final image. Does that indicate a sense of narrative? What I found very interesting was the notion of impossibility. We see in the programme the notation of "impossible dances" and the fact that to create the impossibility that we can come to some kind of completion. The piece ended, I cannot say whether that was a point of completion or not. I don't know whether that for you is an important part, whether we came to this point of completion or whether we are dealing with something which is resistant to closing.

#### **Ghost Island**

It might not be finished yet. Part of the element of creating this piece is your responses and your processing. It's just started, the completion is just started, because it can happen over the course of a few days or weeks, it might not be completed and the final image has only just begun to be processed in terms of its

meaning for those of you who were watching. And actually for us as well, because I think there's enough layers here in the work that for us performing it there's always something new that's revealed to us as we're working.

I think there's incompleteness within the whole framework of the piece. I think it's like Brian is saying, it's the language you're beginning to learn each time you present the piece so that there's like micro structures within that incompleteness or impossibility. Sometimes you just feel like "I can't complete this" and for some reason or other it is achieved. And I think that there is a notion that you are always struggling to reach that point of completion that there is always a sense within you, and I think this is where it comes to this notion of fragility, where it feels like "I don't think I can do this because I feel like I can't jump to those steps," or whatever, and I think that for us all that sense of fragility gives us a sense of being and I think that's really important.

#### **Audience**

What I arrived at between last night and tonight is the question whether we were given too many clues - we'd read material in advance and that to liberals like me pointed to particular dimensions - or whether there is a whole poetic, musical construct above it which we can just sit there and watch, and be entranced or irritated or whatever by what we see. I can react on both of those levels. I was there and I was with my sons who are young teenagers. They had their own reactions, their own images and some of that was what I'd fed to them as a result of what I'd read. So they were getting sort of second-hand images, which brings me back to my original question to do with a concept of iconoclasm, which I think got an interesting subversion in your response. You were saying actually the whole thing was to do with building images rather than breaking images, and yet the original idea of iconoclasm is about breaking images and that's where it's not clear to me how that fits, not only with last night but with the rest of the season.

#### **Chair**

Are we sitting here now wishing to engage in a debate over a notion of a kind of theatre, which has erased the image - to what purpose? If we conceive of this notion of iconoclasm in the theatre as a development of aestheticisation of the process of each production, so that the theatrical has no social function, we find ourselves speechless.

#### **Audience**

It's interesting. There is the political context of the work in terms of a reaction to the well-constructed images with a specific purpose, but these images can be read in so many different ways. Just because there is a point to something, it doesn't mean that everybody gets the same point.

#### **Audience**

Surely that's fragility.

**Audience**

No it's still carefully constructed. That to me is not fragility. There can be an openness, I don't see that as fragile. I see that as a very careful construction of open-endedness. But it's still a very careful construction.

**Goat Island**

I think you have to go much deeper than the meaning of the images, because, although it may be true that not everybody is receiving the same point, everyone is intended to receive the same point. There is a point that is being intentionally communicated and it's up to us to receive that or not - that much is true. But I think you're absolutely right there's fragility in the images that we construct in the sense that there is no intended point, there is no single intended point, we're not trying to sell something. We're not trying to say something that one could sum up in a sentence.

**Audience**

What I really enjoyed about these really carefully constructed images was the way they moved into something else and there was an oscillation, if you like, between the performing of the image and being that image, and I think that's where the anus comes in. There is another mode of reacting to these well constructed images, a mode which is the understanding of the image at a specific point, but there is also yet another kind of intimation which happens when I see the movement. You're not just performing the fragility, you are leading this dance of the balance of the image and your investment in that image.

**Goat Island**

I was thinking about this notion of iconoclasm this afternoon and for me the most insightful story of iconoclasm is a short story by Kleist and it was written in the 1800s and it was called *St. Cecilia, Her Power of Music*. It's really about four brothers who were iconoclasts in Europe during the Reformation, who went into churches and broke statues. They go to a church to bust up the statues there and they're in the process of doing that. At this church the head nun is lying on her death bed and as they're breaking the images, she suddenly appears in the choir as though she's okay and conducts a performance of *Gloria in Excelsis* which she's done every day at this time and the choir sings it and the four iconoclastic brothers are entranced by this. Then she dies and the brothers vanish and they are found some years later in an asylum where they sit motionless for twenty-four hours a day, they don't eat, they don't talk, they don't move and at midnight they throw themselves onto the floor and sing this hymn, but no-one can listen to it because it sounds like the howling of demons. And that's the end of the story. I think that's what pushed this notion a little further, I have no idea how it fits into the rest of the season at all, but I think for us we actually tried to put ourselves into a state of... Like these brothers, they wanted to be strange, but they were so affected by the image that in the end they existed in an in-between state where they wanted to defy and reverse the image at the same time. This was a

state of becoming; it was an ecstatic state. So, if you take, for example, *Hamlet*, we destroy it by presenting a piece of it. Like, in the foreground there is something that is completely unimportant to the point of *Hamlet*, the Ghost and his poisoning. It's a point about presentation. Also by interrupting it. By forgetting it, or forgetting that we're even doing it and then doing something else. We couldn't do that if *Hamlet* wasn't there already.

### Chair

There's a point that I'd like to pick up, the notion of the ecstatic, and connect with your modes of expression where we can construct our own narrative or we can simply enjoy. Why should there be an "or"? It seems to me that it constitutes an "and," that we're actually operating in both those modes simultaneously. You were saying, Matthew, that in terms of ecstatic reception, in terms of taking it for what it is, or as it comes to me, there is the point at which I feel I impose my own closures on what is happening. The meaning actually opens the fragility in that sense and then what ensues from that... Maybe the problem is that if we are working in this mode of reception, that we have to struggle with a new kind of language where we feel empowered to make our response to what we witness, on its own terms.

### Audience

Could we talk about dance, the physical side of it and how you worked, how you put that together? How you felt when you were doing that relentless jumping, it was very contained. It was very intense between yourselves and this pattern that you worked out, I assume, individually. Was that a starting point for some of the things you planned? Did you work on it privately and then come together? I'd just like to know something about the process.

### Goat Island

We set out to construct an impossible event that had a very mathematical structure and then we had a kind of chart or graph that was filled in, each person filled in certain elements. So if you break dance down into things like rhythm, duration, repetition, body part that was used, intention - there was more than that but this is an idea - different members of the company took different characteristics, so no single person constructed any particular gesture. Mark says, "It's to do with the stomach." Karen says "The duration takes as long as it takes to sing the national anthem." Brian says... So it goes on like this, then we have a set of rules for a single movement and then we have many sets of these rules on this graph, then we have this mathematical structure with which it must survive, then we try to do it. For instance, one person performs the entire sequence. These all come in and we put them in a sequence and we made five dances. One person performs the entire sequence, one person performs half of each element of the sequence and then the second half of the sequence, one person performs a third of each element of the sequence, the second third and then the third and there's a person who's doing the fourth. So we're all doing the same movements



but they're chopped up like this and they're interrupted and they're jolted, so we're all doing jumps and so on, but it's broken up. And that's an idea to make it impossible and that's how we did it.

**Audience**

I'm thinking about some of Robert Wilson's works and his influence...

**Geat Island**

I respect Wilson's work, but I don't think of him as a direct influence. Possibly because I feel that what we start with in our work is the parity and the space and I think Wilson starts somewhere else. The other things that come in are important and I feel the four performers and the rectangle are primarily what the work is about. That's why for Wilson it's a certain kind of architecture. It's really important for us that the audience is on two sides and if you come over to the other side you'll see other things. I think Wilson works much more pictorially. When we talk about the image I associate the image with the pictorial, with a flatness, and I think I'm very interested in that you can't view our work that way. That's why it's never designed for the proscenium or the audience on one side and that's very deliberate, because the way it's made is us looking from a lot of places while the action is going on. For me, coming from our background, the word image is almost two-dimensional, and I don't find the work two-dimensional.

**Audience**

That we are able to be in the vicinity of the performers means that our relationship is totally different. When I see a Wilson piece I know that the performers are probably absolutely knackered but I can't perceive that information, whereas here it's so close to me that I feel like: "How much longer is that performer going to be able to continue before they have to stop?" I felt very much in the proximity, it was very warm for me and the humanity was right on top of me.

**Geat Island**

And you're right on top of us. I think there's a pressure that the audience exerts on the performance space that is available to all of us and that comes back to the audience, I think we can feel it, the pressure of the moments when the audience is wanting us to stop doing what we're doing. That's building up a pressure which wouldn't happen if the audience wasn't so close.

**Chair**

Picking up here on Robert Wilson, my experience of Geat Island is that it is very visible in Britain in various contexts, it seems to have quite an itinerancy inside Europe, but I am completely unaware of how Geat Island sits within the context of the United States and America. How do you position yourself within that culture? Where do you figure in that?

### Goat Island

What's happened with reductions in funding is that it doesn't mean that the art isn't happening, it just means that people aren't seeing it because it's not traveling. So work is very, very localized. It's very ironic for us, because Britain is about the size of the state of Illinois, where we live, and there are fifty such states in the United States. So we are very insignificant. The very idea is absurd, really, the kind of political point that we're trying to make, to think that we can make a difference by doing projects like this for these very, very few people. It's an absurd gesture in the United States.

Practically speaking, we've performed in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Oregon, and Minneapolis. But where else in the United States? It's nothing, there is really no money. We could go to more places if we could go for free, but we can't really afford that, we're all poor people.

### Chair

Do you feel that there is a culture for your work in America, because it seems to me that your work resonates with what is happening in Europe?

### Goat Island

I think we have that in Chicago, we have rapport in places where we can go more than a couple of times. There is a very faithful lobby in Chicago. We do a lot of teaching and that's important to keep the dialogue going.

### Audience

Does your work pay?

### Goat Island

We all carry full time jobs as well.

Could I go back to the question of dimension and real space, real time? I think the work is creating an opportunity for an experience in real space, in real time, in three-dimensional space and time. It's not insisting on it, but it's creating an opportunity for that and I think maybe it's because mystical experience always manifests itself as three-dimensional experience... It could be that you just walk out in the evening and across a field far away they're playing the last game today and you just hear the sounds, and you have a mild mystical experience because you experience that space and that time and then it changes. I think that if you have an experience like that which is three-dimensional, where you experience space physically, there's something that resists language about that, which goes back to the discussion about language for the discussion of iconoclastic work. There's something that fundamentally resists language about a real time, real space experience. There's two things happening. One is the notion of silence, of non-meaning that it actually meant nothing and that is a part of the mysticism of it. And the other is that it was actually meaning in motion, that it meant some-

thing, and then it meant something else. Much like, I think, what we try to do in our work, when you see something and it means something, and then a little while later you see it again and it means something else. Or you hear it. And these are the opportunities. One of the reasons we mention education is that we've managed to continue to teach because through teaching we try to talk about these kind of things. People find that if they have these experiences, not that they're mystical, but dealing with real space and real time and an opportunity to deal with what's in front of you in the room, that's a very, very valuable experience. It's repositioning one's body as one's center for movement, rather than one's fingers.

I'd like to pick up this point about if it's set then it can't be working till exhaustion, which seemed to be what some of you were saying. We inflate our working process with our performances. We often talk about this idea of working until we're exhausted, which happens in the process of making the piece. We will do these things until we become exhausted and that determines how we decide to make the link. There are five impossible dances because that's how many we can do. But now of course we've performed them over and over again so we could write five more. But this was in some ways a mythical number for us, because at some point this was how many we could do. We then do solidify it right there and that's it, because somehow that's the way we work. We aren't leaving that kind of systems open. There are some places in the performance where it's different every night, but otherwise we do always have things specifically set and created. This is just how we are. I don't understand why frailty would be haphazard or accidental. I think that it's very carefully constructed and very carefully created and that's precisely why it's so precious and so frail because it took so much to make something that way and it's just so easy to just destroy it, reduce it to dust, nothing, make it disappear.

THE THREE COMPANIES THAT I WISH TO REFER TO IN THIS PAPER TAKE SUCH DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEMS OF PRESENCE AND REPRESENTATION AND THEIR UTILISATION OF TIME, SPACE, BODY, OBJECT, TEXT - THAT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ME TO PLACE THEM TOGETHER UNDER A CATEGORY OF "ICONOCLASTIC THEATRE".

I AM INTERESTED IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN PRESENCE AND REPRESENTATION, BETWEEN PERIPHERY AND CENTRE, BETWEEN BODY AND ENVIRONMENT



*DNS-truppen Good Good Very Good*

RIC ALLSOPP

# On Immobility

## TRAM TRACK I:

I am sitting at a table in the cafe of the newly completed Tanchaus in Düsseldorf. It is raining. I am sitting parallel to the large glass front wall of the building which looks out onto a courtyard bounded by iron gates and railings. The Tanchaus occupies what used to be the central tram depot in Düsseldorf. The tram tracks, which enter the courtyard through the gates and fan out into single tracks each with its own separate entrance to the depot, now disappear under the floor of the new art space, stopped in their tracks. The friend with whom I sit remarks that it is only over one two ideas that really alter things for the individual, that open up new landscapes; the rest disappear without trace. Outside in the rain men and women wait, surrounded with bags of cheap consumer goods for the coaches that will take them back, through the slow hours and days to the east, to the margins and peripheries of Europe.

## ICONOCLASM:

The three companies that I wish to refer to in this paper - BAK-trappen, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, and Goat Island - take such different approaches to the problems of presence and representation and their utilisation of time, space, body, object, text - that it is difficult for me to place them together under a category of "iconoclastic theatre". I am interested in the relations between presence and representation, between periphery and centre, between body and environment. I am

not so interested in whether the theatre work that has been brought together to form the iconoclastic season of work is either "iconoclastic" in the sense of "destroying images" or is "a new phenomenon or force in theatre". In many ways the work seems to reinforce the idea of image in its exploration of the representational conditions of theatre. Nor am I so interested in what seems to me to be a partial and reductive division of theatre making into categories of "mainstream" and "post-mainstream" - categories which all too easily reflect a geography of performance determined by a network of producers and producing venues.

I see the terms of presence and representation, periphery and centre, body and environment (which lie at the heart of questions concerning theatre and performance) no longer in opposition to each other but as describing a dynamic and fluid field of practice and enquiry that reflects the unstable, unsettled, dispersed, contingent and problematic cultural conditions that typify a post-industrial, post-modern sensibility - a sensibility which is no longer located in the urban centres of Europe and America but that is becoming increasingly globalized.

Iconoclasm understood as the destruction of images - a destruction that hopes to bring about radical change - is no longer a possibility under these conditions - or where it is, it operates at a level of detail and specificity that is more or less invisible to the general view. As Baudrillard has pointed out, art has already disappeared as a symbolic pact: "the capacity of art to negate reality, to set up an 'other scene' in opposition to reality where things obey a higher set of rules, is gone" (1994:14). There is now only the possibility of setting up temporary zones of consensus (as Edgar Jager has proposed in his polemic on "ambient theatre" (1997) - at least that is, outside of mass media. The project of art is to take up the fragmented world and find its living connections not in an attempt to reconstruct ideological monuments - the art object or performance as "symbolic pact" - but to create a temporary zone of coherence. Such meeting places or temporary zones are essentially localised, sometimes manifesting within the boundaries of the institutionalised art world, sometimes elsewhere. In this sense a marginal theatre exists. It is not at the level of "theatre" though, but on the wider level of developments in new technologies, in cultural or political alignments, that our views of "the real", "the virtual", the meeting place of images, of representations (the sites of the body, of text, of performance) are confronted and transformed.

This marginal theatre, which partially inherits the aesthetic traditions of experimental theatre, is not predicated - on a historicist view of theatre, nor on a regional or geographical view of peripheries or margins but on difference - the presence of different voices and visions - as much within the centre as on the peripheries. It is predicated on questions that have had no precedent within the discipline, on cultural, political and technological perceptions that shift the discussion away from the conventions of the discipline, and locate its ideas of

slippage, of defocusing, of distribution, of refusal or resistance; on a more profound shift of values, of attitudes towards visually, textually, identity and embodiment - in short on the recognition of difference at all levels.

Knut-Ove Arntzen has proposed an aesthetics of equivalence where the elements of theatre are manifested in non-hierarchical relations and where a "system of axes" focus the point of gravity between equivalent elements according to the particular circumstances of the theatre event (1990:44-6). This equivalence extends to textual, visual, physical strategies. The relation between text and image in terms of dramaturgy is also equivalent: the operations used to develop text are the operations used to develop image. The strategies are deconstructive - recognising the ideologies and assumptions that make up both text and image: the textuality of images, the visibility of text. The distinction between hierarchical and non-hierarchical theatres that Knut-Ove Arntzen proposes provides a means of understanding the differences between the work of Raffaello Sanzio and Goat Island - both of whom work (over extended time periods) to construct points of engagement with the zero condition of hierarchical theatre - and of BAK-truppen whose equivalent and non-hierarchical dramaturgy would seem to approach the zero condition of theatre from an altogether more arbitrary and contingent direction.

Heiner Müller noted that "theatre has to find its zero degree again and again" and in their differences the three companies are primarily concerned with an exploration of the basic conditions of theatre - representation, physicality, identity, presence. If "theatre" no longer holds as a means of adequately describing or categorising the type of performance work that is proposed by BAK-truppen, Goat Island and Raffaello Sanzio - it is because "theatre" as a conventionalised means of seeing is no longer adequate to the conditions of contemporary culture or to the aesthetic explorations that these marginal theatre undertake.

This is not itself a new thought. The "post-dramaturgy", as Valentina Valentini has described it (1996) of Heiner Müller's work already steps outside the boundaries of theatre (not into "a post-mainstream" but into temporary and contingent zones of the performative). This marginal theatre steps into a non-synthetic and non-resolvable dramaturgy where the conventional terms visual, textual, somatic, perceptual, spatial are not replaced by a set of equivalent terms, but by a reduced and contingent sense of ambience, oscillation, indeterminacy, ephemerality. The elements of performance move through a non-hierarchical equivalence to collapse into slippage, resonance, virtuality, vulnerability.

I see on the one hand a "theatre" shared up by the hollowness of its own conventions, shutting out the world, creating an "other scene" that ghosts the real, remembrance, repetition, interpretation, no longer a vision of possible worlds for use; on the other hand I see a "theatre which opens up a landscape, a vision of possible worlds, a zone of temporary coherence. Elements of both of these

views of theatre are present in all three companies: the ethical dimensions of *Goat Island*, the equivalences of *BAK-truppen*, the immobility of *Raffaello Sanzio*.

Heiner Müller felt that "theatre (was) necessary when history is stalled, because it foresees that which is missing; and that which should be aimed towards whereas revolution has no more need of theatre." Valentini writes that

The dramaturgy of Heiner Müller must always be destabilised, avoiding any type of trait that could risk reducing it to a commercial formula, changing continuously, refusing to develop the function of spokesman of the powers that be, that have traditionally manipulated the theatre by way of reconciliation of conflicts and sublimation of rebellion. In order to contradict this eff-lying role [...] the writer must be capable of renewing the actual means of expression, capable of inventing new forms of writing for the stage, consistent with a pressing, traumatic and contradictory reality.(1998)

Such a view of the "post-dramaturgical" role would seem to inform the work of marginal or temporary theatres which operate within contradictory realities where immobility provides both a condition for its presence, and a condition for its absence.

#### Immunity

The critic Jean-Louis Baudry has seen the immobility of the spectator as an essential condition of both "cinematic pleasure" and cinematic illusion. He has compared cinematic spectatorship to the prisoners in Plato's cave who chained and unable to move can only see what is in front of them, "because their chains will not let them turn their heads" (quoted in Walsh, 1997:40-45). By analogy immobility is perhaps also an essential condition of a conventional theatre: that is the immobility of the audience/spectator particularly in relation to the creation of an illusionistic and formal theatre. Immobility has several aspects: the immobility of the image (*Raffaello Sanzio* propose the creation of a timeless theatre "walled in and immobile" - a "barricaded theatre" in which the immobility of representation as image allows exploration of the very conditions by which representation and presence are made possible; the immobility of the spectator which allows the illusionary effect of theatre to take place and also becomes an essential condition of the act of theatre; the conventional immobility of the theatre space (from 17th century onwards), and its inability to maintain aesthetic distance and coherence if this immobility is challenged. It is perhaps interesting to note that as in forms of popular theatre such as vaudeville "during the 'primitive' period (of cinema) the space of the film theatre and the screen space were clearly separated - with viewer free to interact, come and go, and maintain a psychological distance from the image". (Walsh, 1997:40-45).



Heiner Müller talks of "the destruction of the prison that is society, history and ideology" - the immobilising accretions of ideologies and conventions. In the second act of *Hanlofmaschine*, Ophelia declares "I will smash the instruments of my imprisonment to pieces; the chair, the table, the bed" - which are not only read as primary icons and elements of the everyday, but also the primary objects which Imagery (and therefore Ideology) gathers around within the theatre. For example the extraordinary image of the electrified bed in *Amleto*. Iconoclasm suggests the possibility of breaking with form, of breaking therefore with that which is immobile, and of creating a theatre which takes on discontinuity, mobility and a play of equivalence. Both *Goat Island* and *Raffaello Sanzio* choose precisely an immobility of spectatorship, and an immobility of image circumscribed by the setting to investigate the conditions of for example physical impossibility, repetition or endurance, or the autistic silence of the text and the physicality of the actor.

In contrast to the cinema and the conventionalised theatre, interactive virtual realities establish a new relation between body of the viewer and the image. The spectator is no longer chained, immobilised, anaesthetised by the apparatus which serves him or her ready made images: and where she now "has to work, to speak, in order to see"; in these marginal theatres however, immobility remains an essential construct for understanding the conditions through which the image is made possible.

#### **BODIES & CONVENTIONS:**

All three companies invite the spectator to address questions of the nature and operation of representation and physical presence in the work - a further zero-degree of theatre. In the introduction to *The Connected Body?* I wrote about the double status of the body as both representation and presence. This idea locates two stances in an ambivalent and oscillating relationship - undecidable, and unresolvable. I think it is a useful construct with which to read the functions of body and image:

The double status of the body in performance has become fundamental to its articulation in both modernist and post-modern practice. The body participates as a focus of experiments as an experiential site - as presence, a dynamic, moving, transforming and resistant body, and as a site of representation - as reference, as object, as a complex of meanings. This oscillation of status reverts any surety or fixity which might reduce the body in performance to either mere representation (the "reflection of an existing proposition as though it were as fact" as Alan Read has put it) or simple biological presence (a notion of a transparent and immanent presentness). The body in twentieth century performance becomes an ambivalent site which offers modalities of presence and reference, of physical activity and image. (Allsopp, 1996:6).

Such a view proposes the unsettled or unstable body and the unsettled or unstable image as a condition of contemporary performance and theatre work. The deconstruction of the image as a potential carrier of ideologies and the questions that surround the representational functions of theatre and performance are I believe opened up by readings of the performance body in relation to image which treat these elements as both equivalent and inseparable.

In Raffaello Sanzio's *Asiolo* the body of the performer is staged as the location of the performance image, determined as much by our presence as spectators as by the scenic environment he finds himself within. The immobility of the image constructed on an equivalence of the text "to be AND not to be" sets up an oscillating impasse between the actors physical presence (his attempt to reach an impossible clarity and transparency of being) and his image or representation (his attempts to use language to articulate his situation). The image of the whole, mirrored in the body of the actor, is hermetically sealed, literally playing within the proscenium - establishing an "other" illusory scene - that sustains itself at a kind of zero-degree of representation. The image that is created by the dynamic between body and scenic environment renders him mute. There is an analogy with the linkage of batteries - the flow of electricity between terminals causing ignition, noise, explosions, the arcing between terminals, heat. The body of Horatio can never achieve a purely transparent presence - only a mediated presence inscribing and tracing itself within the "scene" that both frames it and immobilises it. The play of "to be AND not to be" - the play of graffiti on the wall - the constant slippage between the present and the absent. The whole "other scene" which is created between presence and representation is betrayed by "leakage": the leakages of the actor's body in piss, and excrement, the leakage of the voice in parallel with the leakage of electricity, of explosions, of gunfire - the "electrified" scene that determines the dynamic of the actor. We are forced to watch the hermetically sealed box of the set containing an almost sealed body: the sealed fluids of the batteries encased and immobilised - the flow of fluids from the broken light bulbs, the leaky body, the cupboard, the fingers that protrude from the metal slit in the metal "mother". The leaky body of Horatio, the body "turned inside-out" reveals in its traces (writing, blood, urine, excrement) the evidence of *Horatio* as idea, as image.

The imprisonment and immobility of the body takes place on both conceptual and literal levels. We are sucked towards the mute space of the image - immobilised as viewers as Horatio is immobilised as actor by the condition of theatre - neither presence nor representation - a mute inscription "walked-in and immobile, eternal as an inscription on a tombstone" as Valentini has put it (1997:58) - crissed to a single letter A which homophonically reads as an Italianised & to be. The letter, the literal, is both beginning and ending immobilised in the present and imprinted on the back of the actor by the anarchic machine of his theatre linking him to his determining and "originary" text. The theatre of Raffaello Sanzio challenges the process of representation itself even though it has to do so through rep-

resentation, Philip Auslander has spoken of this as "... an elusive and fragile discourse that is always forced to walk a tightrope between complicity and critique".

In the theatre of Goat Island we watch ourselves watching the image-flow of the performance space. Immobility is what we are pushed up against - the Memory Man in *How Deep to Me...*, the limits of endurance in *It's Shifting Rests* as they perform the crawl or as Joe Ben lifts his head from the cubic feet of water for the ninth time, as the impossibility of Tom bringing the boat nearer becomes the moment that oscillates between presence and absence, between presence and it's memory. It is a theatre that constantly re-examines the moments of immobility between risk and control, which is constantly forcing and us as complicit spectators back those points of immobility through which the moral and ethical dimensions of our lives begin to open. In this sense I see Goat Island's work not as iconoclastic, not "breaking" images, but testing their resistance (and thus political use) against the realities and values that determine us. The resistant (not but "leaky") body pushed toward the impossible movement, the dynamics of repetition and endurance, as the performer move through moments of representation, of characterisation. The repetition of the image - as the means of a "resistant" theatre of the body - is touched upon in Matthew Gouldish's (continuing) series of "Microlectures".

(A producer named Rolfe went to see *It's Shifting Rests*)

Rolfe said: "What is the reason for all this repetition?"

And I said: "What repetition?"

(1997-98)

The concern with repetition (with immobility in my sense) becomes an opening into the "other" the possibility of moving through into another landscape, another way of understanding the immobility and impossibility of our situation. A way charged with hope. In "Repetition & Impossibility" Mathew Gouldish writes that:

...[i]f we picture our lives taking place on a calendar - a desk calendar, the kind with one date on each page, and all the pages stacked up - if we picture each day of our lives taking place on the surface of one of those pages - and we drill out and remove a core sample of this calendar at any particular moment - for example, the moment when one wakes up in the morning and gets out of bed - then we line up all these moments in a row - one could see oneself in a kind of film, each frame of which shows a different picture of one getting out of bed in the morning. In this way, one could say, "I am always waking up. I am always getting out of bed. Every time it's different. This is my life." (1997-98)

The slow and meticulous process of image making through bricolage, through repetition, through copying and imitation begins to open up into embodiment, or what

Carol Becker called in relation to their work, the "physicality of ideas" - finding a form to "accommodate the mess".

Accommodation - the housing of the image, the immobility of the theatre is what in many senses the theatre of BAK-truppen resists in their (by comparison) spontaneous compositions in relation to given spaces, to given starting points. For BAK-truppen step across the boundaries of expectation in dictating and gesturing to the play of everyday life - the performativity of the real. Or rather BAK-truppen come closer to an "ambient theatre", to creating temporary zones of performance, temporary shelters and accommodations. As has often been pointed out there is no attempt to seduce the audience into any kind of illusion - what you see is what you get, and as such what we get is a another perspective on immobility - the zero degree of the space and time of the performance constantly brought into question. Edgar Jäger in his polemic on "ambient theatre" describes the impact of BAK-truppen "behaving as if there was no theatre and no time span" (1997), questioning the relationship between image space and audience.

The theatre of BAK-truppen seems to me, in its use of a strategy of equivalence to come much closer to the notion of the *dérive* - the drift and slippage of imagery that challenges our expectations and ideas of spectatorship and immobility, of image and immobility, and in doing so maps a psychogeography of ambient performance or ambulant performance based around embodied and decentered subjectivities.

Amelia Jones speaks of "the new experience of subjectivity as embodied rather than transcendental, as in process, as engaged with and contingent with others in the world and as multiply identified rather than reducible to a single 'universe-self' image of the self". (1998:197) Through a strategy of responding to the dynamics of particular space/sites/circumstance BAK-truppen approach the idea of an open and ambient theatre that sets up a temporary shelter or site within which an event can take place.

What is the place of the text in these three theatres? How does text operate? In the work of Raffaello Sanzio the originary text of *Hamlet* has become mute: the possibilities of text as (say) dialogue, as a means of communication between the personae of the play, are shut down. Like the image of the battery, text is treated as a stored, repressed fluid that leaks out of the body of the actor in sporadic monosyllabic utterance, or erupts in a violence of self-inscription on the body of the actor and of the walls of the cell (battery?) that he inhabits: a graffiti which through transliteration and gradual erasure reduces text to the primary letter "A". Text performs itself literally through flowing onto those spaces and surfaces of the theatre where text is conventionally absent. The muted/austic body of the actor forces the text to reveal itself as rather than in the body, to appear as the writing on the wall, the remains of a physical action.

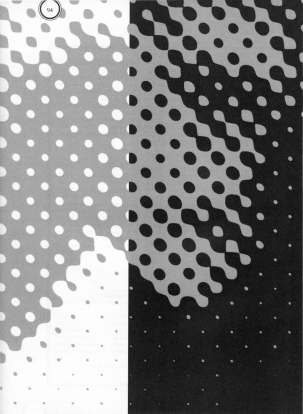
By contrast the multiple, profile and appropriated text of Goat Island serve as collages of memory, identity, of fragmentary and fragmenting narratives. Text as utterance echoes the limits of physical endurance that the actors push their bodies towards. The effect is of a textual fabric that supports a broadly narrative movement, which in turn forms a vocal counterpoint to the physical imagery of the performance, and which stays within the conventions of a theatre text based on a montage of monologues. Textuality and physicality accompany and complement each other. This is again in contrast to the often random textual utterances of BAK-truppen - often mediated through physiologically altered voices - through for example the use of nitrous oxide, or electronic distortion or live mixes - crossing languages, improvised and responding to the conditions of the temporary zones of performance that they have established.

### TRAM TRACKS II

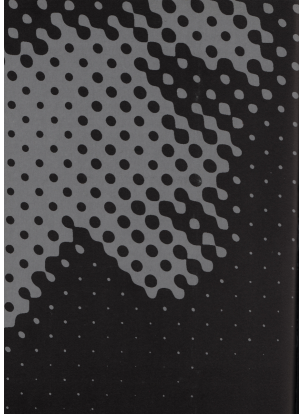
I am sitting at table in the Neues Berliner Kunstverein - a gallery in Berlin. Later in the evening the table will become the site of a small performance that I will make for an audience of perhaps 80 people. I watch the interplay of indifference that takes place at the window: The framed, lit presence of Ulrich Lepke absorbed in his tireless, obsessive observation of the water droplets that fall into a iron dish partly filled with sand from a metal tap placed above the table at which he sits, the precise and graded markings he makes on the paper on the table in front of him. The indifference of the passers-by on the rainy pavement outside the window turning to glance at the figure at the table, the trams that rattle past, faces lit inside by the yellowish glare. A young man passing on the pavement stops to watch. He stands for a while, drawn into the slow rhythms of the work, then raising his hand, he slides open the window and steps through the gap. The sounds and movements of the street rush in.

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Although iconoclasm confronts the disappearance of the image, the term itself is not negative but positive. It does not represent a resolute start denying the manifestation of a phenomenon: iconoclasm is not un-iconic, nor icon-less but icon-smashing. In other words, something that remains visible needs to be made. This is why iconoclasm is always figurative. The iconoclastic orientation gives the artist a pair of hands: one iconographic, the other iconoclastic; one is Abel's, the other Cain's. The latter always has the last say for it destroys - as a type - the archetype living in him: art is thus linked with guilt. The guilt of being as a phenomenon, and then the destruction of that which exists.

The challenging religious figures rightly appear - for an icon is always a religious object. God has nothing to do with the word religious, but what matters is the general atmosphere certain words evoke. An icon is not a simple image. It is a holy image, chosen by the people, held efficient by every church, and regarded as symbolic by every group interested in the initial velocity of certain figures.



It has something in common with the military discourse, for it is an image that is being drilled and deployed, gathering and threatening. In fact, it has that connecting efficiency characteristic of the mechanism of natural catastrophes. Banners are among the most complete icons in history: people are killed and sacrificed for them.

Iconoclasm is, therefore, a force competing - by means of a rupture - with an exceptional force.

Iconoclasm does not bring forth a white wall nor a break with something as of yet undefined, but an image marked by that break, struggling with "that which was before." That, which was before, is no more: thus speaks iconoclasm. With no attempt to go into a historical treatise, we can claim that the end of the period of baroque was, in this sense, one of the most iconoclastic eras in the history of western art. There was a natural link between the image and the rupture. The affluence of forms was such that there was a need for creating whirlwinds, vortices and maelstroms into which the seeds of abnormal spiral growth could be thrown. The baroque image is carcinogenic: deception and doubt are stalking the figure from within. I know it is madness to claim this, but the work of Raphael seems to me an atypical cell of an advanced baroque metastasis: perfect and tight on the outside, yet crisp in the middle. This can be seen in the Vatican Palace frescoes he painted with Giulio Romano, but also on the painting *Lady with a Veil*, where the nostrils and eyes can barely restrain passion, of which we are, for a moment, reminded by the sleeve: like ripped open bowels, so swollen up they seem to be held by some imaginary glass panel, without which it would fall right into the hands of the observer.

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